

Access and Inclusion Committee meeting minutes

The thirty-fourth meeting of the Access and Inclusion Committee was held at 9.30am on Tuesday 28 February 2017 at 99 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh.

- Present:** Maggie Kinloch(Chair)
Audrey Cumberlandford
Veena O’Halloran
Frank Coton
James Dunphy
Lynn Graham
Iain MacRitchie
Anne Mullen
Alan Sherry
Philip Whyte (in place of Vonnie Sandlan)
- Officers:** Fiona Burns (Secretary)
Michael Cross
Loretta Hamilton
Sarah Kirkpatrick
Halena Gauntlett
John Kemp (Interim Chief Executive) (items 17/08 to 17/13)
Carina Macritchie
Sheila Meehan (Clerk)
Anna Thomson
- Observers:** Professor Alice Brown (Chair of the Scottish Funding Council)
(items 17/01 to 17/09)
Professor Peter Scott (Commissioner for Fair Access)
Leni Oglesby
- Apologies:** Vincent Docherty
Heather Dunk
Vonnice Sandlan
Lorna Caldwell

17/01 Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed Professor Alice Brown (Chair of the Scottish Funding Council) to the meeting.

Professor Brown thanked the Committee, Council executive and board members for the excellent work, time commitment and energy that they invested in the Committee.

Professor Brown also welcomed Professor Peter Scott (Commissioner for Fair Access) and stated that all present were keen to hear his access ambitions and how the Council could support him in realising those.

The Chair also welcomed Professor Scott, Anne Mullen, new Committee member and Leni Oglesby to the meeting.

17/02 Declarations of Interests

The chair reminded the members of their responsibility to indicate if they had or may be perceived to have a conflict of interest under any item.

17/03 Chair's business and Council executive update (AIC/17/01)

The Committee received and noted the Chair's business and Council executive update.

The Chair updated the Committee on the Royal Society of Edinburgh's Young Academy of Scotland winter plenary session at Edinburgh Napier University that she and the Head of SFC's Access Team had attended and hosted a discussion session on equality issues for mid-career academic female progression.

The Chair asked the Committee members if the Committee should engage more closely with the issue of inhibited career progress for females due to maternity leave or caring duties.

The Committee advised that:

- It was keen to take a more active role in relation to gender issues within institutions
- Greater importance should be placed on role models to provide women with a positive example of where their aspirations can lead and to support them to achieve
- While policies may be in place in institutions, implementation can be the issue internally

- Female leadership roles were important to demonstrate progression and to encourage flexibility and increase morale
- Demonstration of different career paths, flexibility and opportunities should be encouraged
- Opportunities for a forum to encourage engagement, discuss the issues, including barriers both perceived and actual, and to achieve productive solutions should be investigated
- The actions in the Gender Action Plan in relation staff as well as students need to be implemented
- REF can have a negative impact for those seeking a career break and reduces the options for flexibility of working. The possibility for conversations around the more structural issues in research and academia should be investigated
- The aims of sourcing and sustaining talent should continue to be stressed in the outcome agreement discussions, with gender and demography being reviewed on an individual institution basis.

The Committee **agreed** that:

- A paper investigating demographic and gender differences, on an individual institution basis, taking into account feedback from the outcome agreements, be brought to the May 2017 or future Committee meeting
- The potential for a forum to encourage engagement and discuss issues around female progression and flexibility be considered.

17/04 Minutes of 22 November 2016 meeting (AIC/16/Min3)

The minute of the meeting of 22 November 2016 was confirmed as a true record of the meeting.

17/05 Matters arising (AIC/17/02)

The Committee noted the matters arising from the last meeting of the Committee.

The Committee advised that:

- Proposed changes to Extended Learning Support(ELS) should be discussed with the College Principals' Group
- An Equality Impact Assessment on the funding aspect of any changes to ELS be taken forward.

The Committee noted that:

- Funding colleagues from the Council executive plan to discuss the concerns raised by the AIC in relation to engagement with the Principal's group with the College Funding Group as this is the agreed mechanism for seeking input from Principals
- Committee members would raise any concerns at the College Principals' Group on changes to ELS as appropriate.

17/06 Long-term agenda (AIC/17/03)

The Committee received a paper informing members of substantive agenda items proposed for future meetings.

The Committee **agreed** that an update on the progress on the Commission on Widening Access recommendations be provided at every meeting.

17/07 Update on Council business (Oral)

The Chair gave an oral update to the Committee on the recent Scottish Funding Council Board business meetings.

The Committee noted that, at its recent meetings, amongst other things the Council had considered the Enterprise and Skills Review. The Board received updates and considered the potential impact on SFC:

- Professor Brown informed the Committee of the recent publication, as part of the Review, of Lorne Crerar's report on governance: *Proposals on Governance and the Creation of a Strategic Board* and confirmed that the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work would be making an announcement in early March
- Professor Brown also stressed the need to move forward with the Review to reduce any impacts, including inhibition of progress with the learner journey.

The Committee advised that it was important to stress that education was not just an economic return but a social need also and that there would be an economic cost if access was not improved at a national level. Professor Brown assented and confirmed that it was being stressed throughout that colleges and universities provide education, teaching, research and much more, and that an economic focus was not core to their key activity.

The Committee also noted that Council had considered:

- Outcome agreement progress and progress with negotiating the 2017-18 outcome agreements and the progress on delivery of the previous outcome agreements.
- The college and university funding allocations, the draft Budget and the indicative funding allocations for universities and colleges.
- College innovation, including output from the College Innovation Working Group (which was due to be discussed at the Colleges Scotland two-day conference in March 2017)
- Innovation support for the creative industries, the proposed programme of work being undertaken to support the delivery of the Action Plan for Innovation Support for the Creative Industries and the proposed method of delivery.
- SFC's infrastructure strategy with the aim of feedback from the Board being used to aid future policy work in this area. The needs of the sectors and the challenges involved were covered.
- Glasgow Colleges Regional Board and the progress being made towards the Board receiving fully operational fundable body status.
- A new risk based approach to the monitoring of the governance and financial health of colleges.
- SFC's stakeholder engagement plan, the monitoring and evaluation of strategic projects and SFC's Framework Document with the Scottish Government.

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science attended the January Council Board meeting and discussed the Scottish Government's priorities for the continued improvement of further and higher education and the critical role of the Council in taking them forward.

17/08

Discussion with Professor Peter Scott, Commissioner for Fair Access (Oral)

Professor Scott thanked the Access and Inclusion Committee for inviting him to attend and contribute to the meeting.

Professor Scott provided a précis of his background and his approach to the role of Commissioner for Fair Access, confirming his aim to work in partnership with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the institutions to have a positive impact on access for Scotland.

Professor Scott informed that:

- While the focus would be on young learners to higher education, he would be looking at the bigger picture too and the needs of adult learners
- He aimed to approach the task as an actor, not a narrator, to work in partnership to achieve progress
- There were significant research gaps and it was hoped that some of these could be filled to attain a fuller picture
- The targets from *A Blueprint for Fairness* were ambitious but substantial progress should be made
- The intention was to take a system wide approach. Schools and communities, including parents, needed to be involved too, not just colleges and universities, and that there were multiple intervention points. Sustaining the interaction was important, continuing the relationship rather than just 'tell and leave'
- It was important to stimulate the debate on what was meant by fair access
- He felt that the specific issues were:
 - Adjusted offers were beneficial but institutions ran different systems and there was the potential for more coherence. There was also a need for more push for relaxation on success rates and to ensure that the adjusted offers were provided to those most in need and weren't used as a tool for filling places or to improve success rates for the institution
 - Articulation from HN to degree progression needed, in the cases where students were not credited for the HN, further investigation as to the reasons, and to ensure that HNs were recognised as stand-alone qualifications as well as a transitional option
 - The range of interventions was considerable and there was the potential for more coherence and readability across as well as a more joined-up approach to ensure transferability and scale-up
- SIMD as a definition was quite sophisticated and a good place to start but other sources of evidence should be used in conjunction to see the whole picture. The aim was, where possible, to influence the relevant research that SFC, Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland commissioned to ensure alignment.

The Chair thanked Professor Scott and agreed that SFC and the Committee wanted to work closely with him to achieve progress.

The Committee informed Professor Scott that:

- Working in partnership and achieving a systematic linkup was crucial
- It was important to build an evidence base of what worked and to celebrate success to communicate and encourage access excellence and achievement of outcomes
- Longitudinal research was needed to address what was not being achieved and show overlaps and connectivity
- Context was needed to ensure that demographic differences were addressed and flexible pathways to recognise that learners often took non-linear journeys
- It was important to encompass schools also in the discussions around access and the learner journey
- For those most in need it was essential that they were supported throughout their progress on the learner journey.

Professor Scott thanked the Committee for their input and confirmed that:

- Not all institutions could have the same social profile but it was important that all were involved and that it was their responsibility, no matter what the institutions' histories, to improve their access record and provide the best learning opportunities for all students
- Evaluation of outcomes needed to be built in to programmes to celebrate success and share best practice
- It was important to see through the learners' eyes in relation to articulation from HN to degree and be aware that the cultural and educational differences encountered during articulation would need to be reflected
- It was important that quality and standard be maintained but institutions would have to make adjustments, not just adjust grades, to progress the national access ambitions.

17/09

SFC Plan to respond to '*A Blueprint for Fairness*' (AIC/17/04)

The Committee received a paper outlining a proposed implementation project plan for the SFC to respond to and implement the

recommendations from the Commission on Widening Access final report '*A Blueprint for Fairness*'.

The Committee noted that:

- There were five workstreams within SFC to drive forward progress on the relevant recommendations of the report
- The project plan was an evolving plan with the ability for further development as the work of the Commissioner for Fair Access progressed
- For the 2017-20 Outcome Agreement Guidance national aspirations were displayed as expectations/targets and these were being communicated, through the Outcome Agreement Managers meetings, to institutions.

The Committee advised that:

- The aim was to drive high quality approaches to meeting the learner journey
- A systemic relationship between colleges and universities was the best way to meet outcome agreement targets
- Regulatory powers should be used to encourage collaboration and help achieve the national aspirations if necessary
- A shared discussion in regions would assist the collaborative working approach and ensure that targets were relevant for that region
- The system had to work as a coherent whole to achieve progression and access for students
- Where there are examples of articulation working well, they could be shared as good models for potential development elsewhere
- Demonstration of outcomes and impact would be valuable and should be the focus, with co-ordinated reporting being kept to a reasonable level to alleviate the burden on institutions

The Committee **agreed** that:

- Reporting be directly relevant to expected outcomes and kept to a minimum to reduce the burden on institutions
- Regulatory powers be used to drive progress if necessary while taking into account and supporting the level of collaborative working across regions

- A one-off meeting should take place between the Committee members supporting the Universities Scotland workstreams and the Council executive.

17/10

Progress on the national access ambitions and the commitments outlined in the draft outcome agreements (AIC/17/05)

The Committee received a paper informing on an assessment of the access elements of the draft outcome agreements (OAs) for AY 2017-18 and providing a statistical update on SFC's college access ambitions.

The Committee noted that:

- College outcome agreements were, at this stage, more developed than university outcome agreements
- The biggest concern, at this stage, was on the lack of commitment, in the draft university outcome agreements, to the intake of SIMD20 and SIMD40 and Outcome Agreement Managers were seeking further information
- The aim was to streamline the guidance and have more focus on successful completions and outcomes
- While there were excellent overviews of colleges' access and inclusion approach they seemed to struggle to demonstrate impact, further discussion would take place with the colleges on this
- The equality impact assessment for the totality of outcome agreement funding would be presented to Council.

The Committee advised that:

- Funding and policy decisions should be based on learners and support for them and changes should include an academic rationale
- If there are specific issues with individual colleges these should be dealt with separately
- Equality impact assessments needed to be undertaken on any change to policy impacting on access, not just high level policies, to ensure that any unseen implications were understood/mitigated
- Outcome agreement guidance text should refer to targets and not aspirations

- The outcome agreement target figures would be published in April and it was important that a clear communications plan was in place outlining the ambitions of the sector.

17/11 Update on Student Support funding (AIC/17/06)

The Committee received a paper providing an update on key developments in student support funding.

The Committee noted that:

- All requests for in-year redistribution of student support funding from colleges had been met
- The Student Support Review was progressing with a fast paced and ambitious timescale with the aim of producing an interim report in May and, following consultation, a final report in the Autumn
- Changes to European Social Funds may impact on the demand for student support funding in the FE sector from 2018-19.

The Committee **agreed** that an update on European Social Funds be incorporated into the funding paper being presented to the May Committee meeting.

17/12 Vulnerable Groups – update paper (AIC/17/07)

The Committee received and noted a paper updating on work to support vulnerable groups in accessing, participating and staying in further and higher education.

The Committee advised that:

- That the list of groups ‘at risk’ include those in need of additional emotional support, transgender, kinship carers and young carers
- Investigation take place to determine if student parents be considered ‘at risk’
- An integrated mental health support structure between universities, the NHS and individual GPs to ensure continuity of support would be beneficial to provide a national perspective and coverage, with the proviso that any funding was also integrated. It was noted that SFC would seek to include colleges in that structure as well.

- Evidence of impact would be difficult but, as work progressed, sources of evidence should be sought and added to the available data as relevant.

The Committee **agreed**:

- To the use of the term 'at risk' rather than vulnerable
- To receive an annual update on progress on 'at risk' groups.

17/13

Date of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place at 9.30am on Tuesday 16 May 2017 at 99 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh.