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Mental Health and Wellbeing

You said: we need to offer more support to students with mental health issues
Like all UK Universities, we are facing more demand for support services in this area and subsequently have more than doubled the budget of our Counselling Service over the last decade. We continue to keep levels of provision under review.

The support we offer is not restricted to one-to-one counselling services. We also offer wellbeing workshops, guided self-help and access to clinically tried and tested online support packages. However one-to-one counselling is an area that many of you have raised concerns about – suggesting that we need shorter waiting times and more sessions.

Last year, 90% of students who referred themselves to the service were offered an initial therapeutic consultation within two weeks, with 98% receiving this within three weeks of contact with the Service. At the end of this initial consultation, students are signposted to support and resources they can access immediately (e.g. Big White Wall, Feeling Good app, Skills for Life and Learning psychoeducational groups). We also prioritise students so that those assessed as having urgent need are seen sooner.

The Counselling Service operates a model of brief therapy, which is the most common provision within the UK HE sector. Brief therapy is a model that works well with a university student population. It is evidence based, and our clinical outcome results indicate that a higher proportion of students using the service recover or improve (on the basis of an average of four sessions) than in the sector norm. The average number of sessions used by students is four - this is the average in other university counselling services in both the UK and North America. We understand this is not a ‘one size fits all’ model, with some students being offered and provided with more than four sessions, while others do not need to use as many as this.

You said: we need alternative study spaces for those with sensory issues
The University is currently in the process of reviewing its guidelines for the development of existing and new buildings. Lighting has already been considered in draft guidance on inclusive design and recommendations, based upon current best practice to allow the best possible lighting choices to be selected for the widest range of people’s needs. These guidelines, upon publication, will provide direction for Estates staff who procure changes to existing buildings or new buildings, and external consultants on the standards and requirements of the University.

The first Estates training course on Light Reflectance Values is arranged for 28th February 2019 and will include information on good lighting design to encourage greater awareness and better, more useable lit environments.

We are also looking at current lighting arrangements in the available accessible study spaces to confirm the existing arrangement and see if there is any need to make changes to these.

We are committed to making continual improvements to our buildings and will respond to individual needs, as and when we are made aware of these. If you have a particular additional need, please contact the Student Disability Services in the first instance to seek support.
You said: what student support is on offer when a PhD supervisor-student relationship goes wrong?

Everyone, everywhere has the right to be treated with dignity and respect. If the relationship between a student and supervisor seems to have broken down, students or supervisors can contact their Postgraduate Adviser or School Postgraduate Director. If they cannot resolve the problem then the School Postgraduate Director or the student can contact the Secretary or Chair of the College Committee.

If there are problems with the supervisory relationship then University staff will respect confidentially and limit disclosures to as few colleagues as necessary to resolve the problem. If there appears to be a breakdown in the student-supervisor relationship and problems are not able to be resolved locally, both the supervisor and the student should consider mediation. Mediation is a voluntary process, however the University will always try to resolve conflict in a positive way. That means that the parties who are in conflict should give informed consideration to mediation as a way of resolving the conflict. Schools can request mediation from the College which can contact the University’s accredited mediator in Human Resources for advice. Support for students experiencing problems with the supervisory relationship is available from the Students’ Association’s Advice Place.

Your wellbeing and safety are our primary concern and staff at the Advice Place can discuss what has happened to you in a private space and support you to make decisions on what action you would like to take. This might involve making a complaint within the University’s Dignity and Respect Policy.

The University regards any incident of bullying, harassment or discrimination as a serious matter and will respond promptly and sensitively to formal complaints, and where appropriate take disciplinary action.
Libraries/Study spaces

You said: make standing desks available in libraries
A height adjustable desk is available in all libraries - please ask Helpdesk for location; in addition standing desks or benches are available in some libraries for example the Main Library on Lower Ground and Second Floors; if you wish to propose additional locations please provide further information to Barry Croucher, Head of Help Services (barry.croucher@ed.ac.uk).

You said: change our default search engine to a charity offering
The Information Services Group policy outlines the choice of a search engine which benefits charity - this is rotated bi-annually. The current search engine is EasySearch, approved by EUSA and ISG, the benefactor is Trees for Life.

You said: printing should be further subsidised and students should be given additional printing credit.
Printing credit is under review by Information Services Group.
You said: make it easier to understand how to pay tuition fees and who to contact with questions.

We have a new Finance Helpline that will be able to help with any questions. The new helpline provides a dedicated team of Finance experts providing a one-stop shop service for all finance enquiries and will be live from Monday 21 January. The Finance Helpline can be contacted at finance.helpline@ed.ac.uk
Accommodation

You said: make it easier to rent private accommodation

The University of Edinburgh began operating a Rent Guarantor scheme in 2015. This was done to allow students to rent private accommodation that may not otherwise be available, because a UK-based rent guarantor is required. The scheme has up to 100 places and is open to overseas and EU students, and in exceptional circumstances to UK students where no UK guarantors are available. Currently the scheme covers rent only and the University limits the amount it will agree to guarantee. For the 2018-2019 academic session the limit is £137.50 per week/ £550 per calendar month.

Further information on the Rent Guarantor Scheme and how to apply please visit our webpage at https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-funding/current-students/guarantor
Academic

You said: publish exam timetable earlier
The University is acutely aware of the travel challenges faced by overseas students, particularly in and around the December exam diet. As such, it is fully committed to releasing the examination timetable on the earliest possible date. However, the ability to schedule a clash-free exam timetable is solely dependent on access to a stable and accurate student data set.

The policy regarding student course choices, which allows students to make course choice changes during the first three weeks of the teaching semester, means the exam scheduling process cannot commence until this change period has closed. From this point all Exam Office resource is prioritised to ensure the clash-free schedule and release of the exam timetable on the earliest date possible.

You said: contact hours and assessment on History courses
History is a subject that relies on independent study and for students to get the most out of their contact hours they must spend considerable time in the library working on specialised material. This is a time-consuming process but clear directions are given, often through the use of Resource Lists. This is, and has been for many generations, a fundamental feature of the study of History in UK universities.

We have made a conscious effort to diversify our methods of assessment and to move away from a standard essay and exam format. Many courses have no exam but are assessed by different forms of coursework, some of them highly innovative.

We have completely overhauled the MA History curriculum, introducing new core courses at first and second year - The Historian's Toolkit and Introduction to Historiography - and replacing existing third-year core courses with two new courses on Historical Skills and Methods. These courses are designed to prepare students for independent study at honours level. One of our new second year courses - Themes in Scottish History - uses 'pathways' to help students begin the transition to honours study.

These matters receive constant attention at all levels of School administration, from Committees within the subject area up to the School Management Committee

We have a range of fora in the School in which students can raise issues such as these. Senior officers in the School, including the UG Director, Head of Subject Area and, indeed, Head of School, sit on these bodies and are available to meet with students. Students are represented on most School Committees, including Boards of Studies (which approve new courses and changes to existing courses) and recently participated in discussions at the School Management Committee. We have also have a Student Ambassador scheme and have undertaken a wide range of activities relating to careers, including a career-mentoring scheme.
You said: I am a student based at the School of Divinity and we receive amazing support from the office staff and our personal tutors. Please don’t centralise student support in order to improve it as this would take away from those schools who get really good support.

We are really pleased to hear of the excellent support that you get from colleagues in the School of Divinity! There are no plans to “centralise” student support but it is clear that across the University as a whole, there are wide variations in how well students feel supported by the Personal Tutor and wider student support system, and that is something we need to resolve.

We do want to keep all our options open at this stage – it is the only sensible thing to do with such a review – but we do understand that in some areas things already work really well, and we really don’t want to make matters worse in those areas.
Principal Salary

You said: I would like an overview of how the Principal’s salary is determined
Professor Peter Mathieson’s salary is determined by the University’s Remuneration Committee, which consists of experienced members of the University Court, our governing body. The Principal is not and will not become a member of that committee. The committee takes account of analysis of relevant UK and global benchmark data for Vice-Chancellors’ pay in universities of similar size and complexity. It has been judged that his level of salary is appropriate in an internationally competitive market and is commensurate with the size and scale of the responsibilities of the job.
Services and facilities

You said: the University has expanded student numbers consistently, but our services aren't always able to keep up with demand.

The development of our new strategic plan is explicitly considering the future size and shape of the university. The recent Town Hall meetings outlined our thinking so far including the commitment that “we should not grow for growth sake”.

Information on the process of developing the strategic plan and the opportunity to feed in specific thoughts and inputs are available at:

http://www.ed.ac.uk/strategic plan/2019

Changes in tenancy legislation and increasing demand for rental property as the city continues to grow are acting on rent levels. We recognise this and that we must plan, in that context, expect to house more continuing students. This reflects our responsibilities to our students and our neighbours in the local communities. We have worked with the Students’ Association to increase the number of beds in our lowest price range in each of the last two years.
Food

You said: more options are needed for people with specific dietary requirements at King's Buildings
We work hard to try and ensure that even for those who have a range of food products they cannot eat that they are catered for. It is possibly inevitable that for some the choice remaining might be limited. The University also prepares most of the products served in our outlets in house and so in identifying free from items consideration has to be given to whether there is a possibility of cross contamination in the production kitchens.

The University has an allergen portal which provides a comprehensive list of all items sold and the allergens they contain (or conversely do not). We would recommend consulting this as it may be there are other items that would meet your needs: https://www.accom.ed.ac.uk/for-students/our-cafes/allergen-information/

You said: King's Buildings needs more options for food
The University aims to provide the very best value it can whilst paying the Living wage, ensuring good quality properly sourced food, and ensuring the long term sustainability of the service that is depended upon by many staff and students across the year.

Initial steps have recently started to expand the food offering at King's Buildings, including Brucks, The Tuk Truk and Element in Murchison House, which provides a different range with a strong emphasis on salad items.
Community

You said: leftover food from the University’s cafes could be donated to local food banks and charities.
All chilled cafe food is made fresh daily without the use of preservatives in ACE's production kitchen - not in a sealed factory. This means there are greater controls/considerations around the long term food safety and appropriateness for consumption. Most charities would not accept leftover food from cafes for this reason. ACE aim to minimize food waste as much as possible by moving products around sites. For example, unsold stock is moved to units that are open longer hours or at the weekends.

Other strategies to limit waste, such as end of the day discounts, are also being considered.

Any food which is required to be wasted is no longer safe for consumption so cannot be donated; however, as per Scottish waste regulations, food waste from catering outlets is collected separately and uplifted from the University by our Waste and Recycling contractor. It is taken from the University to an anaerobic digestion plant in Cumbernauld where it is processed into biogas and fertilizer.