

## Senate Presentation and Discussion 7 October 2020 – a brief update

In 2020/21 we aim to provide a brief update following the Senate presentation and discussion ‘open sessions’.

The presentation topic on 7 October 2020 was ART: Students, and the presenters included the President of the Students’ Association Ellen MacRae, the Vice Principal Students Colm Harmon, the Vice Principal International James Smith, the Deputy Secretary Strategic Planning Tracey Slaven, and Deputy Secretary Student Experience, Gavin Douglas. Ellen MacRae and Gavin Douglas have provided some updates below.

### Students’ Association

The Students’ Association thanks Senate for the positive feedback received at October’s meeting on our approach to gathering student feedback and representing the views of our members.

We have continued to be proactive in providing a voice for students on a wide range of issues including accommodation, teaching and learning, mental health and wellbeing, and academic support.

We have worked closely with University colleagues to understand students’ concerns, both with regards to their Programmes and their wider student experience, and ensure issues are escalated appropriately.

We have also built strong relationships with Elected student representatives at other institutions, particularly across the Russel Group, enabling us to lobby more effectively at the national level.

Finally, we recognise that, despite the many challenges of this academic year, University staff are working incredibly hard to ensure the very best experience for our students. In light of this, we are pleased to have launched our 2021 Teaching Awards shortly before Christmas, providing students with an opportunity to thank staff for their hard work and celebrate the very best of teaching and support at the University, something that’s more important than ever right now.

### Curriculum and Student Experience

In response to the audience comments at Senate on 7 October we can provide some updates on some of the topics discussed.

The Welcome Week app was seen as a success: we are now using the app for events throughout the year and it now includes a wide range of activities on offer including health and wellbeing; digital skills; decolonising the curriculum; Sports Union “Give It a Go” activities; activities for students in accommodation; and events specifically for international students. See:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/students/activities-and-events>

A great deal of work is being done to continue and develop services and initiatives to support student mental health:

- Continued to deliver the full range of counselling and other professional wellbeing services throughout lockdown, albeit mainly online, including recruitment of 5 additional counsellors to deliver increased capacity in the Counselling Service

- Extended the Listening Service to operate 24/7 365 days a year
- Set up a Virtual Contact Centre to answer queries from students and families about any aspect of Covid and life at the University
- Employed additional staff to carry out regular wellbeing checks with a) students of concern (over the winter holidays) and b) students in self-isolation (at any time)
- Introduced daily online wellbeing activities online including various forms of exercise, yoga and mindfulness classes, as well as podcasts, blog posts and short courses on how students and staff can acclimatise to life in lockdown
- Introduced a Student Accommodation self-care kit and a variety of in person and online activities for students in accommodation including cookalongs, walking groups, quizzes, growing plants and more.

At Senate, a range of opinions and concerns were expressed about the return to teaching on campus. We have continued to try to balance the demands of a very challenging pandemic environment (with frequent changes to what is allowed / not allowed on campus); staff concerns about health and safety; and a continued sense (e.g. as expressed in the monthly Pulse surveys) of low student satisfaction with the hybrid experience to date.

### [Links to further information](#)

For students:

- [Covid-19 updates for Students](#)
- [Edinburgh University Students' Association](#)

For staff:

- [Covid-19 updates for Staff](#)
- [Adaptation and Renewal Sharepoint site](#)
- [Bulletin magazine](#)