

NEWS

student experience project



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

April 2014



Welcome



Welcome to the first quarterly update from the Student Experience Project. A key aim of the Project is partnership working, and it's with this in mind that we'll be publishing regular updates, to keep colleagues informed about what's happening and invite you to get involved.

The Student Experience Project was launched in autumn 2012, with the goal of enriching the experience of all students at the University – by increasing our understanding of the student experience; and piloting and implementing new sector-leading services and activities.

There is a vast amount of work underway across the institution and I look forward to sharing what we have all contributed to, so far.

More detailed information on the Project structure and objectives can be found at www.ed.ac.uk/student-experience.

If you have any questions about the Project please don't hesitate to get in touch: sepmanager@ed.ac.uk.

Mark Wilkinson

Student Experience Project Manager

Upcoming events

UK and Ireland National PASS/PALS leader conference

7–8 November 2014, Informatics Forum

100 students and staff from institutions across the country will attend this national Peer Support event which is being hosted by EUSA and the University. The two days will involve an exciting programme of workshops, speakers and opportunities to share practice and experience. If you are involved in Peer Support and are interested in attending conferences workshops or networking events, please contact mimi.watts@eusa.ed.ac.uk.

Recent events

Peer Support awards

1 April 2014

Student volunteers and staff involved in Peer Support projects were invited for cheese and wine in Teviot. Students received certificates of recognition for their contributions this year.

Gearing up for induction 2014

31 March 2014

'Gearing up' was a huge success with 120 staff from across the University attending. The event aimed to support staff to get ready for induction, share good practice and share research on the student experience of induction and transition. A number of staff who attended are already keen to collaborate with the induction team to enhance their own activities. For more information about the event, link to:

www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/pages/viewpage.action?title=Gearing+Up+for+Induction+2014&spaceKey=SEPROJ

Continued professional development for student leaders: turbocharge your presence

26 March 2014

This public speaking workshop was run by comedian Susan Morrison and Beltane Public Engagement.

About the project strands

Peer support

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The Peer Support project (staffed and managed from within EUSA) continues to grow rapidly:

- 45 projects are currently operating across the University;
- More than 430 students have been trained as student leaders;
- 90 School-based staff are actively engaging with the project;
- An average of 15 students are participating and benefiting from peer support for every two student leaders.

The project continues to identify new work areas which will be implemented in Semester 2.

The scale and success of the Peer Support Project at Edinburgh has achieved both national and international recognition:

- NUS recognition nationally as an excellent example of partnership between a students association and a university;
- Participation in a joint research Global Partnership Project with the Universities of Wollongong, Sydney, Western Sydney, New South Wales and Macquarie;
- Presenting a paper at the 8th International Conference on Supplemental Instruction (SI)/PASS hosted by the University of Missouri-Kansas City May 2014;
- The Project has been approached by the Universities of Glasgow, Stirling, Strathclyde, Napier, West of Scotland and Skyline Dubai for advice and guidance on setting up and running peer support projects;
- Presenting work to the International Enhancement Themes Conference in 2013.
- Contributing to the Higher Education Academy Students as Partners Summit.



Schools Councils

"For me, the best thing about the School Council is that it has brought together students from three very diverse subject areas and given them a voice as a part of a wider community."

Abie Alfrey

PPLS School Convenor



Contact

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School Councils have been established in nine Schools exceeding the original target of six. This work is being managed by EUSA with the aim of empowering students to effect positive change at School level. Headline figures show good levels of student engagement:

- More than 300 students have attended a School Council event;
- 144 students are following the projects online;
- 39 students stood in the EUSA elections for School Council positions.

Highlights from School Council meetings have included two 'Informatics Conversations' events with more than 100 students and staff attending to discuss a wide variety of topics.

See our Case Study on page 8.

Pre-arrival and induction support



The Induction Team works through a University-wide Induction Coordination Group and is continuing its work in building relationships with key contacts within all Schools and with EUSA. The findings from the Induction survey of new undergraduate and postgraduate students are now available on this wiki: <http://edin.ac/1dmr27W>.

Recent work has included further enhancements to the New Student webpages, with new students arriving in January 2014 in mind.

The team has completed its strategy for delivering enhanced pre-arrival and induction support, which includes its vision for 2015. This is also available on the wiki: <http://edin.ac/1dmr27W>.

See also our Case Study on page 7.

Online and innovation in student services

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This strand of the Project is focussing on the online student experience and the ways technology can be used to enhance it.

One pilot initiative has offered our students access to the Big White Wall. This is an online early intervention service for people in psychological distress. It combines social networking principles with a choice of clinically informed interventions to improve mental wellbeing.

Usage among our students has continued to grow (300+ users in March 2014) and an evaluation will soon be undertaken to decide on future use of this resource. For more information visit: www.bigwhitewall.com/.

Over the next year this strand will focus on capacity building through short-life projects and the development of training and support resources across student service areas (primarily Careers, Disability, Counselling and Chaplaincy). Part of this work includes the delivery of 'Technology Enhanced Delivery for Dummies' workshop(s) aimed at central student services staff.

For further information, see the Project web pages: <http://edin.ac/1qTZLnF>.

Student Information Points (SIPs)

Contact

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From December 2013 the SIP team formally joined with the Student Centre team based in Student Administration (formerly part of Academic Registry) under the leadership of Robert Lawrie, Director of Scholarships and Student Administration.

A paper was presented to the SEP Board in January 2014 outlining the vision and planned development for this new service. The paper outlined further integration with core SASG student-facing

services and how this model will develop across the wider University over time. The two SIPs based in the Main Library and in the Murray Library at King's Buildings are now able to deliver a much wider range of information and services to students, replicating those delivered in the Student Centre in Old College. The team are continuing to develop and refine the future vision for the second stage of development of the service.

Student surveys

Contact

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The Student Surveys Unit is responsible for overseeing student surveying activity in the University. The team are currently engaged in delivering the 2014 National Student Survey and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey. The Edinburgh Student Experience Survey recently closed and findings will be circulated in May. Further work includes piloting the second stage of course evaluation work with nine Schools using 'Eva Sys' software as a way of delivering course-level student evaluations, using either hard copy or online tools. Work has also now begun with regard to the post-pilot phase of the 'Eva Sys' project. Discussions are taking place with IS Apps and the Procurement Office with regard to a full purchase of the 'Eva Sys' campus-wide licence, if a positive conclusion about the value of this approach is reached.

Applicant experience

Contact

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This project strand aims to enable greater self-selection by prospective applicants; to select students best equipped to benefit from the Edinburgh experience, from diverse backgrounds; and to develop admissions policy and practice to enhance the applicant experience. Recent and ongoing work includes:

- **Selection** – Developing tools and communications to enable improved self-selection by prospective applicants; considering the criteria used to select those students best equipped to benefit from the Edinburgh experience.
- **Admissions policy and practice** – Revising and developing new policies that support the University's commitments to fair and transparent admissions - to enhance the applicant's experience, and promote equality, diversity, and widening participation.
- **Direct admissions review** – This was completed over the summer of 2013 and improvements to systems, process and policies have been identified that will enhance the applicant experience and support equality and diversity.

Student communications

Since joining the University, the Student Communications Team has established a range of new channels for communicating with current students, including social media, web news and a monthly email newsletter.

As well as coordinating University-wide campaigns such as 'On the same page as you' and Innovative Learning Week, the team support colleagues in developing locally managed communications activity.

The focus for the coming year is to ensure our students understand how we use their feedback to enhance the student experience. The team also aim to engage students in the actual delivery of student communications.

Further information

Student News www.ed.ac.uk/news/students/latest
On the same page as you www.ed.ac.uk/same-page
Student Communications wiki edin.ac/1aWtSGh

Student community engagement

Contact

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Dawn Smith took up the post of Community Engagement Development Officer in February. The aim of this new post is to: explore, through appropriate development work and audit of existing initiatives, the potential requirements

for the University to develop community engagement as a key strand of student activity. This post combines SEP funding together with an additional six months of funding provided by Information Services in respect to the planned focus on the exploratory use of MOOCS by students in community settings.

Emergency response

This Task Group, chaired by Bruce Nelson, College Registrar (Science and Engineering) reported to the SEP Board in January on their evaluation of our current practices and resources relating to support for students who are in a crisis or emergency situation. The recommendations made are now being considered by Gavin Douglas (Deputy Secretary) and Mark Wilkinson (SEP Manager) and may lead to piloting new approaches in this area – in particular in support of students experiencing mental health crisis.

Programme and Course Information Management (PCIM)

Contact

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This part of the project is examining how we store, manage and use academic information. PCIM aims to provide accurate, consistent and usable information to support academic choice. It also aims to deliver robust solutions to the management of information and to reduce duplication of effort.

A working group has been established to develop draft principles for programme and course design, development, approval, changes and closure and an associated forward plan for approval by the Senatus Curriculum and Student Progression Committee (CSPC) in June. The work of this group will be informed by the revised UK Quality Code Chapter B1 Programme design, development and approval.

The members of the Working Group have been drawn from: Colleges and Schools, Student Systems, IAD, Communications and Marketing, Careers, and EUSA. Four meetings of the group are being held between February and May.

Ten brainstorming sessions with staff took place between 21 January and 6 March. These were to discuss handbooks and the course descriptor template. The handbook sessions explored the purpose of programme and course handbooks and possible core content. The course descriptor sessions explored how the current course descriptor can be enhanced. More than 90 staff from 29 different Schools and central departments took part.



This project strand is undertaking work to ensure a holistic approach to health and wellbeing at the University of Edinburgh, in the spirit of a 'healthy university' as promoted by the Healthy Universities Network involving institutions linked across the UK.

The initial consultation event launching this work took place in November 2013 when around 30 staff and students contributed their views on the direction and purpose of this work stream. Two posts have recently been filled to coordinate and develop work with a health-promotion approach. This work is currently being led by the Centre for Sports and Exercise closely supported by the Sports Union and a range of other student services. An Advisory Group was established in March 2014. This work stream continues to benefit from the growing network of universities participating in 'healthy university' work and the most recent national newsletter reports on the new developments at Edinburgh:

www.healthyuniversities.ac.uk/newsletters.php?s=203&subs=68

Looking ahead

Further to the activities mentioned above, the Project team will be undertaking the following work in collaboration with various departments:

- Project staff are working with Student Systems and Student Recruitment and Admissions to progress the deployment of Tribal software to enable the piloting of a new approach to an online enquiry management/FAQ system, with a focus on the **pre-arrival** stage;
- The University Web Programme Team will continue to work closely with the project to develop content for key student-facing web sites and the **Enhancing the Student Experience website** – enabling the work of the project to be communicated to staff. This work includes working with the Student Communications Team to refresh sections of the students pages on the University website;
- Working with the **Careers Service** to plan and pilot the use of internships specifically designed for postgraduate research students;
- Reflecting on how best to support the growing interest in a **Student Experience Network** involving academic and professional services staff from across the University;
- Refining the **Impact Evaluation Framework** for the project and supporting staff to embed this approach in their work.
- Continued planning for the transfer of successful project initiatives, activities and services to existing departments.

Who is involved in the Student Experience Project?

The project is governed by a Board, chaired by the Deputy Secretary, Gavin Douglas. Members of the board include:

- Dr Sue Rigby, Vice Principal Learning and Teaching (Project sponsor)
- Professor Ian Pirie, Assistant Principal Learning and Development
- Dr Tina Harrison, Assistant Principal Quality and Standards
- Rob Tomlinson, Head of Media and Communications & Deputy Director, Communications & Marketing
- Alex Munyard, EUSA Vice-President (Academic Affairs)
- Nadia Mehdi, EUSA Vice-President (Societies and Activities)
- Sarah Purves, Acting Director EUSA (Representation, Student Support and Activities).

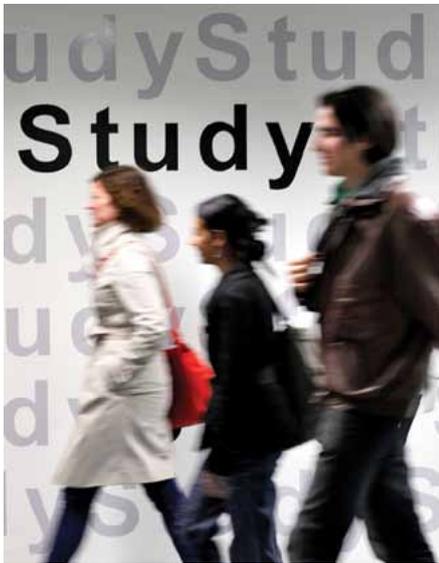
Academic and professional service colleagues from Schools, Colleges and other departments are also represented on the board. For a full list of membership, see the project wiki.

Many of the project's activities are overseen by task or advisory groups which draw on the expertise of many other University staff and students. In total, more than 90 staff and students have supported the project to date, through their participation in these groups.

Our twenty staff are currently working to deliver project activities. Many are embedded in existing teams such as Communication and Marketing, EUSA, Academic Services, the University Web Programme, Student Administration (Academic Registry), and Student Recruitment and Admissions. Two additional staff will shortly join the Project to work in the Centre for Sports and Exercise developing the new 'healthy university' work strand.

CASE STUDY

First year students' learning journeys: the first semester through your eyes



Academic induction

"This project was designed to find out how it feels to be a first year student arriving at the University, and to open up a space in which students could share their learning journey and reflect with the team as their first semester progressed.

This small-scale study was self-selecting and 14 students from across all three Colleges signed up to participate. As we also wanted to begin a staff-student dialogue about the student experience, a second layer of the study involved interviewing teaching staff across the Colleges. Despite its small sample size, the study is proving to be tremendously valuable for the Induction Team and Study Development at IAD as it complements the existing quantitative surveys that the University carries out by adding colour and depth to our understanding of the first year student experience at Edinburgh.

The analysis of the data is currently underway. However, what is very clear in this early stage is that the student participants felt that they themselves got a lot out of taking part. Our intention was to involve students as 'co-researchers' in the process, as we thought that this approach would enable our student participants to benefit from the study on many levels. Our impact and evaluation analysis suggest that was indeed the case.

The feedback from the participants has been overwhelmingly positive:

- 100% of student participants noted that they felt positive about their contributions being listened to; most reported that they particularly liked being able to give the University feedback;
- most reported liking that they were encouraged to look back at their own

learning journey and to see how they had developed.

As a result of taking part in the study participants noted that:

- they had a stronger sense of being a part of the University community;
- they had learned more about how they managed things that were stressful in their studies;
- they had learned more about how they managed their time.

'...[as a result of the study] I've seen my confidence changing... I think when I first got here, it was all a bit big and overwhelming and I felt very small and like nobody would notice. And taking part in this, the being listened to thing, I don't feel quite so small and... indistinct.'

Student participants also reported that one of the main reasons they liked the study was because they felt that they were contributing to change:

'...well, it [the study] means that I do participate. I get involved, I don't just like get squeezed through this degree tube and pop out of the other end... I actually get to effect change, I'm being listened to and... the whole thing is sort of dynamic.'

'...it wasn't another survey I had to fill [in]. And I feel like this interview can make a change... I am not just one of 40,000 students. I am being listened to.'

We are delighted that 'First Semester through Your Eyes' which was designed to provide a richer understanding of the student experience has done not only that but also made such a positive contribution to the student experience of our participants. We look forward to sharing the preliminary findings with you at our 'Gearing Up' conference."

Abby Showlin

Academic Induction Coordinator

Preliminary findings from the research were shared at the Induction Team's 'Gearing Up' event on 31 March 2014 and will also be presented at the upcoming ALDinHE (Association for Learning Development in Higher Education) Conference in April.

CASE STUDY

How Schools Councils are influencing the student learning journey



“School Councils play a dual role of improving the student experience as well as student engagement, fostering a more fruitful academic community”

Alex Munyard, EUSA VPAA

The Biomedical School Council has made real progress towards influencing change and working in partnership with the School to implement projects. Building on the feedback that many 1st and 2nd year students felt they needed more time in the laboratories, the Biomedical School Council is now working with the School to implement a Lab Tour programme led by Personal Tutors. Without the opportunity to meet, raise and discuss these issues at the School Council, an initiative like this might not have come to the fore.

Partnership working

Additionally, the Biomedical School Council is looking forward to working with colleagues in the Peer Support project to explore the possibility of setting up an Academic Families programme. The Council, as a forum for discussion, followed up on student’s aspirations to develop a cross-course academic community. With the assistance of Peer Support, this could lead to a flagship model of partnership working.

Philip McGuinness

School Councils Coordinator