The University of Edinburgh

Senate Education Committee
Wednesday 18 November 2020, 2.00pm
Conducted via Microsoft Teams

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**Minutes of the Meeting of Senate Education Committee
held via Microsoft Teams at 2.00pm on Thursday 10 September 2020**

1. Attendance

Present	Position
Tina Harrison	Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance (Convener) – Ex Officio
Sabine Rolle	Representative of CAHSS (Learning and Teaching)
Lisa Kendall	Representative of CAHSS (Learning and Teaching)
Stephen Bowd	Representative of CAHSS (Postgraduate Research)
Judy Hardy	Representative of CSE (Learning and Teaching)
Michael Seery	Representative of CSE (Learning and Teaching)
Antony Maciocia	Representative of CSE (Postgraduate Research)
Neil Turner	Representative of CMVM (Learning and Teaching, UG)
Paddy Hadoke	Representative of CMVM (Postgraduate Research)
Richard Andrews	Head of School, CAHSS
Iain Gordon	Head of School, CSE
Mike Shipston	Head of Deanery, CMVM
Fizzy Abou Jawad	Edinburgh University Students' Association, Vice President Education
Stuart Lamont	Edinburgh University Students' Association, Permanent Staff Member
Sue MacGregor	Director of Academic Services – Ex Officio
Velda McCune	Representing Director of Institute for Academic Development – Ex Officio
Shelagh Green	Director for Careers & Employability – Ex Officio
Melissa Highton	Director of Learning, Teaching and Web Services Division of Information Services – Ex Officio
Sian Bayne	Assistant Principal Digital Education
Philippa Ward	Academic Services (Secretary)
Apologies	
Colm Harmon	Vice-Principal Students – Ex Officio
Rebecca Gaukroger	Director of Student Recruitment & Admissions – Ex Officio
Sarah Henderson	Representative of CMVM (Learning and Teaching, PGT)
In Attendance	
Neil McCormick	Educational Technology Policy Officer, Information Services
Paula Webster	Head of Student Data and Surveys

Members welcomed the 2020/21 Edinburgh University Students' Association Vice President Education to the membership of the Committee.

2. Minutes of Meeting held on 25 May 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2020 were approved.

3. Convener's Communications

3.1 Update on COVID-19 Recovery – Adaptation and Renewal

The Convener advised members that the focus of the current work being undertaken by the Adaptation and Renewal Team (ART) was the impending return to campus, extended welcome activities, and timetabling. Members noted that the majority of teaching activities were now on the timetable.

4. For Discussion

4.1 Student Survey Results September 2020

Members welcomed the paper which sought to ascertain whether there were significant differences in levels of satisfaction between different student groups, and what insights could be drawn from feedback in the open comments sections of the surveys. The paper concluded that, while there were differences between different student groups, it was unlikely to be possible to drive improvements by targeting specific groups. Instead, the University needed to look at systemic issues that were driving dissatisfaction overall.

Key causes of student dissatisfaction were:

- Lack of consistency across Schools and courses and in the way in which 'Learn' is used by different areas of the University.
- Lack of structural scaffolding in programmes: for some students, the amount of choice is overwhelming and difficult for them to navigate.
- Assessment and feedback, including the view that marking is inconsistent
- A sense amongst students that they are a source of income for the University and that the University is not welcoming (a lack of sense of belonging).
- Inadequate mental health support services: a sense that these require investment and prioritisation by the University.

Members appreciated the level of analysis in the paper and considered the focus on the surveys' open text comments to be particularly useful. Members noted that:

- the information obtained from the Survey would provide useful input for discussions relating to curriculum transformation. It was noted that the issues raised were not new and highlighted the need to progress the curriculum reform agenda as soon as possible.
- there was a link between some students' poor experiences of individual staff members and the findings of the Staff Survey that poor staff performance is not well managed by the University.
- while some students find course choice overwhelming, programme choice and flexibility remain a selling point for the University.
- there would be value in comparing the data for online and on campus PGT programmes to see if there were lessons to be learnt from this.
- the issue may be a wider, cultural one and the University may need to ensure that its focus is learning, not teaching
- organisational management may be a key issue.

The Committee agreed that the Convener would discuss with the Vice-Principal Students developing an action plan to address the issues raised by the survey. Members recognised that any action plan should align with action that had already been or was being taken (for example through the Student Experience Action Plan, Service Excellence Programme and implementation of the Student Mental Health Strategy) and should take careful account of the student voice.

Members were reminded that all survey data could be accessed at:
https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/StudentAnalytics/SitePages/Insights-Hub.aspx

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Action: Convener to discuss with the Vice-Principal Students developing an action plan to address the issues raised by the student surveys.

4.2   PGR Covid Survey: Themes and Actions

The Dean of Postgraduate Research (CSE) advised members that many of the survey's findings were in line with previous surveys of the University's PGR students. Key themes were:

- The quality of the supervision experience
- Lack of study space
- Lack of access to resources
- The need for more investment in mental health support
- The need to embed careers development

The Committee was advised that the Doctoral College was planning to use the survey's findings as the basis for a development plan for the Doctoral College.

4.3   Students' Association Vice-President Education Priorities 2020/21

The Students' Association Vice-President Education provided the Committee with an overview of her priorities for the year:

- Improving the quality and consistency of teaching and feedback – it was noted that there is significant student discontent about the way in which feedback is relayed. Hybrid teaching had required all feedback to be provided online, and it was hoped that this would continue post-Covid.
- Ensuring all students have access to high quality academic support – the level of academic support received by students is highly variable. It would be important to take steps to address this in academic year 2020/21 given that the implementation of the outcomes of the Personal Tutor and Student Support Review had been delayed.
- Creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment – the Vice-President Education expressed the view that hybrid teaching had been beneficial in this context, and again hoped that the progress made would continue post-Covid. The Vice-President Education would also be assisting the BME Liberation Officer with work to tackle the BME attainment gap during the year.

The Committee noted that the Vice-President Education's priorities were well-aligned with the issues raised by the 2020 student surveys. Members discussed low levels of student

satisfaction with the Students' Association. It was hoped that planned worked around improving student representation would help to address this.

4.4 PGR Matters:

4.4.1 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)

The Committee was advised that PRES is run every other year and is due to be run in academic year 2020/21. A number of universities were choosing not to run the survey this year due to Covid-19, but Edinburgh would run the survey to allow issues to be identified and to ensure continuity.

4.4.2 Allowing In-Person Supervision

A position paper on in-person supervision for PGR students, mirroring the guidance put in place for taught students meeting with their Personal Tutors, had been produced. It permitted in-person supervision to be offered where safe to do so. The paper would be considered by ART Students on 14 September 2020 and sent to Senate Education Committee for information.

4.4.3 Policy Changes Around Remote Vivas

The Committee was advised that the University is in the process of considering policy changes around remote vivas. At present, it is not possible to run vivas in person, but historically, remote vivas have been discouraged. It was hoped that going forwards, a more flexible approach would be possible and that both in person and remote vivas would be permitted under the regulations.

4.5 Recommendations for Online Examinations and Assessment

Members recognised that it is essential for the University to have robust, fair and defensible arrangements in place for online examinations and assessment. Both staff and students are concerned about the potential for unfairness and misconduct to arise from a move to more online assessment.

The Committee considered the paper's recommendations and discussed the following:

- Recommendation 1 – members were content to accept the recommendation but recognised that the timescales involved were short and that annual monitoring for academic year 2020/21 was already underway. The Convener and the paper's author would give further consideration to what was feasible in terms of monitoring of assessment outcomes in the coming academic year.
- Vivas – Members expressed the view that these should always involve two members of staff or, as a minimum, be recorded. The Committee recognised the potential difficulties associated with a viva taking place some time after the original assessment, which was likely to be case for vivas associated with end of Semester 1 assessment.
- Online proctoring – the Committee had significant concerns about online proctoring. It was noted that the expectation was that this would be used exceptionally, and that

the University would produce clear guidance on what these exceptions were. Mainstreamed proctoring was not the intended direction of travel.

- Allowances for upload times and application of late penalties – it was agreed that there was a need for greater clarity and consistency here.

The Committee was content to approve the paper's recommendations, subject to more work being done on the way in which they would work in practice. Members highlighted the need to ensure that any decisions taken in order to address current issues did not create unintended, long-term issues for the University.

The Committee discussed Semester 2 2020/21 assessment and the need to communicate a clear position on this as soon as possible.

> **Action:** Convener and paper's authors to give further consideration to Recommendation 1.

4.6   Virtual Classroom Policy

Following consultation with the trade unions, Education Committee had agreed between meetings that the University should produce a separate Virtual Classroom Policy. The Committee noted that paragraph 12 of the draft Policy had been substantially revised in response to concerns about the potential editing effort required if students asked for their contributions to be deleted from recordings after the event.

The Committee approved the Policy and agreed that the frequency of student requests for deletion of their contributions from recordings should remain under review in Semester 1 of academic year 2020/21. A communication about the new Policy would be sent to all staff and students.

4.7   Internal Periodic Review of Centre for Open Learning – Recommendation Remitted to Senate Education Committee

The Committee considered the recommendation from the Internal Periodic Review (IPR) of the Centre for Open Learning (COL) that COL should be given opportunities to fully embed its activities and broad range of expertise in language teaching, adult education and widening access in the fabric of the institution.

The Assistant Principal Digital Education noted that the Edinburgh Futures Institute was keen to work with COL to consider access routes to PGT programmes in particular.

The Committee recognised that COL was represented on the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences' (CAHSS) Undergraduate Education Committee and therefore had access to Senate Education Committee through this route. It also noted that the Dean of Learning and Teaching for the College of Science and Engineering (CSE) sat on the CAHSS UG Education Committee and that there was therefore a link between COL and CSE. As such, Education Committee agreed that the correct structures were in place to allow COL to contribute to University-level discussions around Education, but recognised the need to remain mindful of COL's contribution, particularly during forthcoming discussions around curriculum transformation.

4.8   Committee Effectiveness Review – Questionnaire Initial Analysis

Members noted the outcomes of the review and accepted the actions recommended in the paper.

5.   For Information

5.1   Senate Education Committee Priorities 2020/21

Members noted the Committee's priorities for academic year 2020/21

5.2   Course Enhancement Questionnaires – Hybrid Teaching Questions

The Committee was advised that two new questions would be inserted into Course Enhancement Questionnaires (CEQs) in the coming year with the aim of gathering information from students about their experience of hybrid teaching.

The Committee supported including the additional questions in the CEQs, but had concerns about some of the terminology used. Members considered there to be a lack of clarity about whether the University was seeking feedback on hybrid or digital learning.

The Convener, Head of Student Data and Surveys and Assistant Principal Digital Education would give the matter further consideration.

> **Action:** Convener, Head of Student Data and Surveys and Assistant Principal Digital Education to discuss the terminology used in the additional CEQ questions.

6.   Electronic Business Conducted Between Meetings

6.1   Guiding Principles for Personal Tutors and Student Support Staff *(considered by electronic business between 11 and 27 August 2020)*

Members noted the approved Guiding Principles, which were provided for information.

7.   Any Other Business

7.1   Outdoor Education

The Head of Moray House School of Education and Sport advised members that the current circumstances were raising interesting questions around learning theory and the relationship between place, space and pedagogy. A discussion paper considering these issues would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

7.2   Support for Curriculum Development Group

Members were advised that the Support for Curriculum Development Group (a task group of Education Committee) had not met since before lockdown because business that would usually be considered by the Group had been taken forward by other bodies. In particular, there was significant overlap between the work of the Group and matters that were currently being considered by the 'Delivering Curriculum Resilience' strand of ART. Members noted that the work of the Group would continue to be paused for the time being, although ELDeR requests would be considered and approved electronically by the Group.

Philippa Ward
Academic Services
20 September 2020

Senate Education Committee
18 November 2020
Space, Place and Pedagogy: 'Beyond Digital'
Learning and Teaching

Description of paper

As will be evident to all, the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted Universities. Campuses have adjusted to accommodate physical distancing and teaching and learning adapted to on- and off-campus delivery. Our University has responded through remarkable innovation in digital education and the concomitant upskilling of staff to provide hybrid learning. However, distance-learning through digital spaces is just one alternative to traditional lecture and class-room settings. Therefore, this paper explicitly advocates for continued pedagogical innovation alongside the recent Covid-induced 'digital-first' response by proposing **that our campus and its surroundings be used to provide spaces and places for successful and stimulating hybrid approaches to learning now, and in the future.**

Additionally, the Covid emergency focus has masked other, arguably greater, worldwide emergencies such as the climate and biodiversity crises. Cognisant of this broader context, the paper responds to both the immediate pandemic and the ongoing crises we face, by addressing the fundamental question - 'what is (higher) education for'? In this paper we use two technical terms. The first is *Place-Based Education* by which we mean a purposeful translocation involving staff taking their students out on campus and into the city's urban, green and blue spaces (referred to in this paper as 'outdoor') for credit-bearing and non-credit bearing teaching and learning. This translocation and the teaching methods adopted can be both local and in-person and online where students who are unable to travel to Edinburgh can be engaged in Place-Based Education wherever they live. The second is *Shared Learning Spaces* a concept that unites elements of the physical, virtual, digital, cognitive and social spaces into a coherent concept of shared learning, which benefits both lecturers and students and impacts positively on the quality of student learning.

Action requested / recommendation(s)

Objective 1: Discussion and guidance

Aim: To begin a discussion about how Place-Based Education and Shared Learning Spaces might inform the University curriculum review.

Request: To inform, and to receive in-principle support and guidance from the Senate Education Committee.

Resource: Depending on guidance, resourcing may be required.

Objective 2: Identifying and mapping

Aim: To identify and map the 'early adopters' across the Schools and within varied subject areas of the University who are already delivering innovative Place-Based Education (a digital mapping project is already underway with EDINA) and Shared Learning Spaces (financed at its inception by the University).

Request: To inform, and to receive in-principle support and guidance from the Senate Education Committee.

Resource: Resourcing for both projects is being agreed at Moray House School of Education and Sport.

Objective 3: Developing capacity

Aim: To develop capacity across the University for the delivery of high quality interdisciplinary Place-Based Education and Shared Learning Spaces awareness. This will require discussion beyond the proposers of this paper.

Request: Agreement to present a further paper to the Senate Education Committee once Objectives 1 and 2 are complete. In delivering both objectives we anticipate being better positioned to write this subsequent paper.

Resource: Depending on guidance from the Senate Education Committee, resourcing may be required.

Background and context

This paper builds on an earlier paper '*Moray House School of Education and Sport response to COVID-19 through pedagogy, spaces and places'* and features on the Institute for Academic Development's Hybrid Teaching Exchange website. It argued that whilst the immediate online response is entirely understandable it does present its own health and educational risks in terms of encouraging too much screen-time, the impacts on learning due to reduced practical and experiential activities on and off-campus etc., and reputational risks to the University such as the changes to student-student and staff-student engagement (with potential implications for student recruitment), and how this affects community building.

The Covid crisis offers an opportunity to reflect and develop. However, to genuinely make innovative, engaging and contemporary progress we need to pause and ask hard questions concerning which pedagogies are emerging and others that may be 'submerging', to ensure opportunities are not overlooked as we strive to maintain educational continuity and financial security. University of Edinburgh students expect and deserve a unique high-quality learning experience; this paper supports that ambition.

Discussion

'Beyond digital' learning and teaching

The Hybrid Teaching Exchange paper, informed by interdisciplinary research into teaching and learning, was designed to: 1) provoke discussion about Place-Based Education, 2) raise awareness of existing innovative Shared Learning Spaces around our campus, and 3) stimulate the University to consider how it might better

use such places and spaces to provide high quality learning experiences. We do not advocate fundamental changes to the University's portfolio of programmes, instead we seek to consider how some (and increasingly more) existing courses and programmes can be mobilised differently to: 1) meet the very specific challenges we are facing this year, 2) offer additional ways of teaching through the Covid emergency, and 3) stimulate thinking on how a blend of such approaches and practices may be both beneficial and sustainable.

Such a proposal requires consideration of practical and conceptual issues. Perhaps the most obvious practical consideration is that staff will be concerned about how they can safely work outdoors. Moray House School of Education and Sport (MHSES) staff have very recently worked with colleagues in the Health and Safety Department and colleagues in the Institute of Academic Development to revise the relevant Risk Assessment process and develop educational guidelines for outdoor teaching to include consideration of Covid restrictions. These guidelines will support University-wide colleagues who already teach outdoors (where the risk of transmission is far less than indoors) to comply with Scottish Government and University guidance when they teach outdoors. Further information on Risk Assessment, Scottish Government guidance and outdoor teaching activities are available on the Adaption and Renewal Team SharePoint site.

The most significant conceptual issue is the widespread view that historically teaching and learning happens indoors. The fact that this has come to be, does not mean that it has to be. Covid-19 has brought an acute awareness of how space impacts on teaching and learning. This is not simply a case of deciding whether teaching should be online, virtual, indoors or outdoors but promoting the sorts of thinking that leads to educational innovation. To this end we offer four ways forward: capacity building, diverse estate/location, distinctiveness, and broader benefits.

1. Capacity building: Objectives 1 and 2 will help with the identification of 'early adopters' whilst Objective 3 will help create the climate for change. However, before proceeding with Objective 3 we should: 1) pause to reflect on our knowledge gathering process, 2) summarise our learning to date, and 3) return to the Senate Education Committee to plan for the development and delivery of Objective 3. We seek to identify future curriculum objectives or priorities that would be supported by consideration of Place-Based and Shared Learning Spaces approaches and designs.

2. Diverse estate/location: Our University is situated within a landscape that is rich in natural and cultural resources and also communities which offer unique learning opportunities. Similarly, our off-campus students (nationally and internationally) who are unable to travel to Edinburgh, and reside in different time zones, live in spaces and places full of educational potential (this is true wherever they are). These on and off-campus opportunities provide valuable resources, or 'affordances', for learning and are currently used by relatively few programmes. This proposal seeks to increase these flexible, unique and personal opportunities across the University and help deliver the University Estate's vision to develop outstanding teaching and learning spaces.

3. Distinctiveness: No other UK University has, at least publicly, made the connections to the benefits of outdoor/community-based learning outlined here and this would provide something distinctive for the University of Edinburgh 'offer'. The

diverse natural and built landscapes and social dynamics around campus *and* in students' off-campus neighbourhoods, provide rich opportunities for place-based interaction. We also know that many students' choose to study at our University because they want to live in and experience Edinburgh. This focus allows us to re-conceptualise 'hybrid' learning as *three* interconnected learning contexts **– on-campus** (face-to-face), **on-line,** and **outdoor** through place-based approaches to education. This would cater for some of those students who are in Edinburgh but may not be able to come to campus due to health concerns or caring responsibilities and those who are overseas in a range of different time zones. Some Place-Based learning can be designed to be undertaken by students on their own (and/or with the people and places around them), and at a time that suits them, enabling greater autonomy and flexibility in the organisation and management of their study time in light of e.g. increased need to be at home. Asynchronous online facilitation can support this learning.

These pedagogical arguments predate Covid-19 yet continue to be relevant to our long-term adjustment to, and recovery from, the pandemic. We have unrivalled expertise in Outdoor Learning, Place-Based Education, Shared Learning Spaces (MHSES) field studies (Geosciences and Biological Sciences) greenspace research (ECA- OpenSpace), health and well-being (Chaplaincy and MHSES), interdisciplinary and cross university working (IAD) and specialists in broader health, wellbeing etc. in other Schools.

4. Broader benefits: The purpose of this paper, in the spirit of experiential approaches to education, is to develop capacity by encouraging more colleagues to experience for themselves the benefits of teaching and learning in different spaces and places. For some courses and programmes these benefits may be found in relation to existing learning outcomes whilst other courses and programmes, where appropriate, may need to adjust their learning outcomes. The current Graduate Attributes Framework identifies the *skills* and *mindsets* that inform a University of Edinburgh graduate. However, there is no equivalent 'Staff Attributes Framework' to determine if our own *skills* and *mindsets* provide the sorts of learning, teaching and research that will effectively promote, cultivate and nurture the very *skills* and *mindsets* that we seek to develop in our students. This proposal is based on the principle that for change to happen some form of (positive) educational disruption is necessary. We seek to centre-stage this relationship between staff and students, *skills* and *mindsets* and teaching and learning. As such the processes of engagement may usefully extend to developing Place-Based Education and Shared Learning Spaces, that inform other aspects of the curriculum review.

University Priorities

There are three University priorities that underpin this proposal - internationalisation, interdisciplinarity and sustainability. The impact of this proposal across these priorities will become clear as each objective is achieved but preliminary observations may be helpful at this stage.

Internationalisation

Covid-19 has placed a spotlight on the significance of places both in terms of where students and staff are, and for many, where they are not allowed to be. As a result, many of our students have ended up in places that are inconvenient for us to teach

them resulting in many of us teaching in ways with which we are unaccustomed. Whereas traditional approaches to teaching and learning might perceive this significance of places as an inconvenience, place-based approaches would consider this inconvenience to be a virtue. Through the conversations we have identified in Objective 1 we expect to be able to suggest how Place-Based Education and Shared Learning Spaces can contribute to the practice and conceptualisation of internationalisation by focusing simultaneously on innovative teaching and learning practices that are clearly student-centred and place-based, and at the same time provide 'an Edinburgh experience' for students living in the City, and also for those studying abroad whose experience of the city is vicarious. Both Place-Based Education and Shared Learning Spaces promote a conceptually flexible approach to teaching and learning embracing both global and local aspects to promote a sense of community and identity wherever our students are. As such these may usefully inform the local version of *Global Insights* currently being developed by Professor James Smith.

Interdisciplinarity

Universities have found it difficult to work in interdisciplinary ways with traditional department structures and subject specialisms not always encouraging innovation in teaching and research. Place-Based Education and Shared Learning Spaces encourage educators to think and act in interdisciplinary ways because they target communities and addresses inequalities that exist within them and so the process of education begins with a problem and not a subject. A good example of this is the collaboration our University has recently started with IntoUniversity by creating a learning centre in Craigmillar to widen educational opportunities for people living in areas of social deprivation.

At a local level, Place-Based Education can simply begin with a walk, or a learning journey, as this university lecturer did. However, robust partnership building with, for example, the City of Edinburgh Council, Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace, various social enterprises and NGOs will bring added value. At a global level the idea of so-called 'wicked problems' helps to identify real-world issues. One of the characteristics of wicked problems is there is often disagreement about how to tackle them and so their complex nature inevitably requires interdisciplinary responses. An excellent response to this is the *Edinburgh Earth Initiative* which is a "bold framework for the University to build global partnerships that make distinctive and significant contributions to addressing the challenges of climate and environmental change". The fluidity of Place-Based Education that constantly reciprocates between the local and the global makes it a good approach to promote interdisciplinarity and the sorts of *skills* and *mindsets* in students and staff that are compatible with the Graduate Attributes. Through the conversation we have identified in Objective 1 we expect to be able to outline how Place-Based Education can address the practice and conceptualisation of interdisciplinarity.

'Shared Learning Spaces', is an interdisciplinary concept that is rapidly gaining international recognition from universities (e.g. University of Melbourne) for bringing together expertise in design, built environment and pedagogies to connect physical, social, cognitive and virtual spaces for 'agile' learning. This will enable our University to become world leaders in this area.

Sustainability

Sustainability is often cited as an example of a wicked problem because of the vast range of stakeholder involvement that is required to address an issue as complex as the worldwide emergencies such as the climate and biodiversity crises. Our University is already committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Social and Civic Responsibility Plan aims to reduce inequality and improving environmental protection. This has specific implications for teaching and learning around the University in order to deliver these ambitions. The Covid-19 crisis does not compete with these crises but rather combines with them and adds to their complex nature and there are huge risks associated with focusing on one without the others. Covid-19 is thus entwined with any contemporary exploration of 'wicked' sustainability problems and acts as further justification for Higher Education to adopt Place-Based Education as a pedagogical approach within teaching and learning and as a social responsibility. Through the conversations we have identified in Objective 1 we expect to be able to outline how Place-Based Education and Shared Learning Spaces can address the practice and conceptualisation of sustainability and this fits well with the forest and land proposals developed by the Department of Social Responsibility and Sustainability currently under discussion at the University Executive.

Resource implications

The three objectives named in paragraph 2 above are low-cost, opportunity-led and time-relevant initiatives. Staff time has been agreed by the Head of Moray House School of Education and Sport and the Director of the Institute of Academic Development for Objectives 1-3 up to and including the follow up paper to the Senate Education Committee.

Risk management

All developments are subject to the current and on-going, up-to-date advice from Scottish Government and University of Edinburgh Covid-19 advice. Off campus activity is subject to the risk assessment procedures approved by the Department of Health and Safety.

Equality & diversity

Equality, diversity and inclusivity are core to this proposal as we seek to encourage boldness and innovation in these challenging times. Our purpose is to challenge current dichotomous interpretations of the hybrid model and push for a pluralistic conception of hybridity that meaningfully considers the experience of all learners and teachers and their pedagogical relationships. Learning outdoors in different places and spaces provides an alternative but also complimentary addition to sedentary and cognitive approaches to learning (indoors and online). Online platforms have limitations and accessibility issues, related to health and wellbeing, technology and equality which outdoor and Place-Based Education can help address. At the same time learning outdoors has its own limitations because some students find outdoor spaces challenging to access. All spaces operate differently for different participants. We advocate against a deficit model of Equality and Diversity where

different forms of learning are noted for their problems as opposed to their opportunities. At a strategic level this would mean Equality and Diversity being accounted for across the range of provisions of a subject area. At the point of delivery all outdoor teaching would be subject to the normal schedule of adjustments for all learning needs. Because the University is located in a city renowned for the richness of its green-spaces, its history and culture, access is generally straightforward, and much is available on or close to our campus buildings. Further information on equality, equity and social justice may be found here.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

Authors

Dr Beth Christie

Dr Dave Clarke

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Professor Pete Higgins

Professor Robbie Nicol

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Presenter

Professor Robbie Nicol

6 November 2020

Freedom of Information

Paper is open.

Senate Education Committee

18 November 2020

Doctoral College: Operational plan 2020/21 update

Description of paper

1. This paper presents a summary of the Doctoral College operational plan for 2020/21 (full plan attached in Appendix A) and proposes an update to the management of PGR operational matters from the PGR Steering Group to the Doctoral College Operational Group.

Action requested / recommendation

2. The committee is asked to **note** the Doctoral College operational plan and to **approve** the change from the PGR Steering Group to the Doctoral College Operational Group. Members are invited to provide comment on the operational plan.

Background and context

3. The Doctoral College was set up in January 2020 and has developed considerably in the period since then. It now operates as a digital team of 200 members of staff from Colleges, Schools, Deaneries and Professional Services. This team meets bi-monthly via a DC online forum. The student-facing DC has a Sharepoint page and Twitter and increased digital presence through web pages is in development. DC student representation is being developed in partnership with EUSA.

4. Since its formation, the Doctoral College has delivered on a number of high-level outcomes which have supported and enhanced postgraduate research at the University. The active engagement of College, School and Professional Services representatives in this work has been crucial and the DC provides a coordinating structure for this to work effectively.

5. The PGR ART group was convened in June 2020 and will continue throughout 2020/21. It has oversight for PGR matters impacted by the current pandemic. Many of these issues dovetail with the themes set out in the DC operational plan. The PGR ART group works closely with the DC to ensure streamlined communications and coordination of these matters.

6. In paper EC 19/20 2E SEC approved the creation if a PGR Steering Group to provide temporary management of operational matters for Postgraduate research. Changes are now required to clarify the operational oversight structure for the Doctoral College.

Proposal

7. The Operational Plan 2020/21 has six key themes and a set of associated tasks. Each overarching theme is sponsored by a DC lead, but tasks will be driven forward by using the expertise and engagement with the wider DC team, through working groups where beneficial. Colleges have consulted on the plan through the usual Committee structures.

8. For this academic year, the PGR ART group will act as the oversight group for issues of strategic importance, which are included in the plan. This is a time-limited role due to the impact of the current pandemic. The structure for strategic and operational oversight of PGR matters will be re-evaluated when PGR ART is disbanded.

9. The PGR steering Group will be renamed as the Doctoral College Operational Group. The remit and composition of this group are included in Appendix B.

Resource implications

10. There are no additional resourcing requirements with work and communications taking place through existing, and established, Doctoral College channels.

Risk management

11. A risk register has been created in tandem with the operational plan. This is owned by the PGR ART Group (Chair: Professor Antony Maciocia).

Equality & diversity

12. There are no obvious EDI issues other than the gender and ethnicity balance of the group.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

13. The PGR ART group will meet regularly through 2020/21 to drive forward and evaluate the operational plan. Oversight for this and other PGR operational matters will be provided by the Doctoral College Operational Group. Actions taken forward will be communicated and consulted on through the wider Doctoral College and route through College committees. The members of the Doctoral College Operational Group also sit on the other committees (SRFSG, RPG, APRC).

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2020

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Antony Maciocia

Freedom of Information
OPEN
Appendix B

Doctoral College Operational Group

Remit

13.1.   Promote and formulate implementation of strategy from Education Committee and other governance groups. Recommend the creation of working groups as required to progress operational delivery of enhancements to the PGR experience for students and staff.

13.2.   Formulate new policy and procedures for PGR. Approve operating policy to harmonize practice across the Colleges. Recommend changes to the postgraduate degree programme regulations and postgraduate assessment regulations for further approval/recommendation by APRC, Senate or Court.

13.3.   Coordinate doctoral training activity across the university and approve training of supervisors.

13.4.   Support and provide academic advice to Edinburgh Research Office and Research Policy Group for research training grant applications.

13.5.   Support and provide academic advice to Student Recruitment, Human Resources, Scholarships and Edinburgh Global in matters of student recruitment including scholarships and their pay and conditions.

13.6.   Engage in horizon scanning to anticipate and prepare for new opportunities and likely future developments in postgraduate research student education.

13.7.   Proactively engage with any high-level issues or themes arising from relevant internal and external satisfaction surveys, including outcomes from REF, ELIR and internal Reviews though liaison with Senate Quality Assurance Committee.

14. In terms of oversight the group will:

14.1.   Act with authority, as delegated by the Senatus Education Committee, in order to take decisions in the area of postgraduate research student education.

14.2.   Support and encourage diversity and variation where this is beneficial, whilst seeking consistency and common approaches, where these are in the best interests of staff and students.

14.3.   Report to every meeting of SEC.

14.4.   Liaise with relevant Court and Senate Committees and with specific managers, services and offices in respect of issues or instances where matters of academic policy intersect with management or financial issues.

14.5.   Composition College deans or directors with delegated responsibility for postgraduate research student training (currently, Stephen Bowd, CAHSS; Paddy Hadoke CMVM; Antony Maciocia, CSE; Robert Semple, CMVM). Meetings will be convened by one of these and responsibility will be shared.

14.6.   College academic affairs staff with lead responsibility for postgraduate research students (currently Amanda Fegan/Julia Ferguson, CSE;Kim Orsi, CMVM; Kirsty Woomble, CAHSS).

14.7.   Head of doctoral education in the Institute for Academic Development (currently, Fiona Philippi).

14.8.   The postgraduate research representative of the Students' Association (currently,Martyna Napierska).

14.9.   One of the Doctoral College student representatives (on rotation)

14.10.   Academic policy officer with lead responsibility for postgraduate research students (currently, Susan Hunter) who will act as secretary to the group.

14.11.   Project and planning support officer (currently Ian Glen)

14.12.   The group will co-opt further staff to advise on specific policy areas as it sees fit.

Frequency

15. The group will aim to meet at least every two months throughout the year but will conduct much of its business electronically.

16. All university related matters concerning postgraduate research students should be routed through this group to provide coherence and strategic oversight.

Senate Education Committee

18 November 2020

Providing an excellent learning experience for our international students: opportunities and challenges

Description of paper

This paper sets out some current challenges in providing excellent learning experiences for all of our international students. It also provides examples of good practice and suggests possible actions for further improvement.

Action requested

Education Committee are asked to discuss the findings and consider the possible actions suggested in the paper.

Background and context

I was prompted initially to write this paper by discussion with new teachers on the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice a couple of months before the covid-19 pandemic started. These teachers were seeking guidance as to how best to provide excellent learning experiences, particular for international students, under sometimes challenging circumstances. Further conversations with more experienced colleagues across the University suggested that – while there is excellent education practice for our international students – there are also areas of concern. Many of these issues are still relevant for hybrid learning and teaching and into the future.

Our international students are, of course, highly diverse and it is important not to make generalisations. That said, there are some groups of international students who may face particular challenges in our context that we need to consider if we are to provide the best learning experience. Making the transition to a less familiar language and a less familiar learning culture in the context of one-year PGT programmes would be one example. The challenges of transition are magnified when there is less time for transition processes. The intention in this paper is to highlight a range of examples of good practice that could be shared more widely and to explore areas of concern that might warrant more thorough review. The intention is to promote initial discussion rather than suggest overarching solutions. This paper is a starting point for discussion and draws on a limited range of sources.

Discussion

The value of international students to the University

At Edinburgh, we rightly value the international learning experiences we can offer our students (Strategy 2030). When they are well-designed and well-supported, such international experiences can prepare students well for their lives in a globalised world and can act to reduce prejudice and promote equity (Mallman et al., 2019). Students can learn

to reflect on their own perspectives, consider the global context of their learning and become more skilled at communicating with diverse peers (Lehtomaki et al, 2016). Multicultural and diverse groups - whether of home or international students - can increase creativity and enhance the quality of academic work (Mallman et al., 2019). Our international colleagues and students are crucial to our positive impact in the world and to our teaching and research excellence. Internationalisation and decolonisation of the curriculum is essential to meet global challenges and for employability (Heffernan et al., 2019) and international students can make important contributions to these curriculum processes.

Good practice across the University

1) Work in the University on **curriculum as a site for social justice and anti-discrimination** and on **inclusive curriculum** provide positive examples of how to design curricula that would benefit all students including our international students:

   https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/finalreport-curriculumpromoteinclusionequalitydiversity.pdf

   https://www.teaching-matters-blog.ed.ac.uk/mini-series-the-importance-of-diversifying-the-curriculum-reflections-from-the-senate-task-group/

   https://www.teaching-matters-blog.ed.ac.uk/tag/curriculum-site-for-social-justice-anti-discrimination/

2) **The Mastercard Scholars Programme** is a wonderful example of learning opportunities for and with international students: https://www.teaching-matters-blog.ed.ac.uk/transformative-leadership-the-mastercard-foundation-scholars-program/

3) **The Go-Abroad Staff Programme** offers opportunities for staff to develop intercultural awareness and new networks: https://www.ed.ac.uk/global/staff-mobility/benefits

4) Our **support for Syrian academics:** is a lovely example of positive international values and intercultural learning possibilities: https://www.teaching-matters-blog.ed.ac.uk/online-teaching-workshop-for-syrian-academics-in-turkey/

5) **The MSc in Surgical Sciences** has provided excellent opportunities for learners from Malawi: https://www.teaching-matters-blog.ed.ac.uk/enabling-equitable-access/

6) **The Race Equality and Anti-Racism action plan** has decolonising the curriculum as an action and asks each School to take this forward.
   https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/uoe_race_equality_and_anti-racist_action_plan.pdf

Some of these examples are somewhat peripheral to core curricula in the University. One contribution that the Institute for Academic Development could make here would be to surface and share more good examples of internationalisation embedded in curricula across the University and beyond.

Challenges for offering excellent learning experiences

This section sets out some of the current issues around providing the best possible learning experience for our international students and offers some suggestions for possible ways forward.

1) **Over generalisations about international learners:** Unfortunately, it is quite common in the University to hear students from particular cultures talked about as if they were all the same. This manifests, for example, in requests for guidance about how to support 'Chinese learners'. Of course, students from any country will actually be highly diverse in their perspectives on learning and learning experiences (Xu, 2006; Shan, 2020). Some will be from privileged backgrounds, some from cities, some from rural areas, some with extensive international experience, and some who have not travelled outside their home countries before, and so on. Overgeneralisation can therefore reinforce misconceptions and unreasonable stereotypes (Heng, 2018).

   POSSIBLE ACTION: Include guidance and discussion on this topic at events in Schools that all teachers are likely to attend. IAD could provide video and other resources to support this.

2) **Students who lack racial literacy or experience in building cross-cultural relationships:** There have been some examples of students who lack good understanding of equality, dignity and respect acting in ways that exclude international learners. This has included students asking for their small group teaching to be done in separate groups so they do not have to work with other students they perceive as disadvantaging them due to poor English language skills. Similar social marginalisation and racism have also been reported in other HEIs (Cheng et al., 2018; Mallman et al., 2019). More generally, the research evidence suggests that - while dominant-ethnicity students report positive attitudes to cross-cultural opportunities at university - they tend in practice mainly to interact with students from their own cultures (Mallman et al., 2019). Further, a minority of home students may not have realised the value that international peers bring to their learning (Heffernan et al., 2019).

   POSSIBLE ACTION: Extended induction processes with team building, discussion of expectations and well-managed social events could be valuable to begin to address some of these concerns.

3) **The experiences of BME learners in the University:** Elaborating on point (2), the recent Thematic Review relating to Black and Minority Ethnic students notes that BME learners (who will include some of our international students) experience a 'significant lack of racial literacy among staff as well as from students' p1. This can contribute to social and academic isolation that will likely harm students' learning experiences. The review drawn attention to attainment gaps for some BME students and the need for more extensive training for staff in racial literacy. The involvement of BME students in the co-creation of inclusive curricula will also be key.

   POSSIBLE ACTION: See the Race Equality and Anti-Racism Action Plan:
   https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/uoe_race_equality_and_anti-racist_action_plan.pdf

4) **Sudden variation in cohort sizes without adequate preparation and consultation:** One common concern among the colleagues was that the cohort sizes of international students on their courses and programmes sometimes varied dramatically from year to year. This sometimes seems to be occurring without the agreement of teachers and without time to recruit additional teachers. This can lead to over-stretched teachers struggling to provide a good learning experience for students who are making challenging learning transitions. It seems that political changes – such as difficulties for students from China accessing Universities in the US – may contribute to sudden spikes in applications.

   POSSIBLE ACTION: Enhance lines of communication between teachers and admissions decisions makers.

5) **Particular patterns of student diversity:** some of the teachers we spoke with were struggling to work out how to teach well in the context of certain patterns of student diversity. One example of this is having a large group of students from one international context and very few from elsewhere. This can mean that some students do not get the international learning experience that they would reasonable expect from this University. This has also been reported as an issue for other HEIs (Cheng et al., 2018). Tensions between student groups may also occur and need to be well-managed. Another potentially difficult pattern is where there is a large cohort of students who are finding the English language requirements of their programme difficult while at the same time having very diverse subject area backgrounds.

   POSSIBLE ACTION: Consider whether some patterns of student cohorts could be adjusted where they are unlikely to result in a good learning experience for all. Or consider additional teaching resource for programmes with challenging cohorts.

6) **Insufficient consideration given to inclusive curricula and decolonising curricula:** An inclusive curriculum is one "Where all students' entitlement to access and

participate in a course is anticipated, acknowledged and taken into account" Morgan and Houghton (2011). This therefore includes giving careful consideration up front in course and programme design as to how diverse international students will have excellent learning experiences where they feel fully valued and included. Our experience on the task group for promoting inclusion, equality and diversity in the classroom was that there was considerable variability across the University in how well-informed and prepared teachers were to take forward inclusive curriculum design. While there is some excellent practice these is also clearly room for improvement. Decolonising the curriculum needs to go far beyond considering which authors are in reading lists. These processes should include deep consideration of how our pedagogies might reinforce existing power imbalance and exclusion and asking why we are favouring traditionally Western pedagogies rather than considering wider possibilities to meet learning outcomes.

POSSIBLE ACTION: Emphasise inclusive curriculum in upcoming curriculum review processes.

7) **Linguistic and cultural considerations for active learning:** A subset of international learners from some cultures, including Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC), may be less experienced in some of the sociocultural expectations of Western classrooms (Heng, 2018; Shan, 2020). This is by no means the case for all students from CHC, as many have experience with international teachers or family and friends who have studied internationally. Active learning practices similar to those in Western HE are also being used in some CHC universities (Shan, 2020). Where learners are, however, less experienced in the typical learning activities of this University when they arrive, it is crucial that we give good transition support and consider which teaching practices would be most inclusive. The difficulties of doing so can be magnified in interaction with the other challenges mentioned in this section of the paper.

Struggling to communicate the richness of their understanding in discussions in English can be a significant challenge for those international students for whom English is not their first language. This can be exacerbated when those students with strong English lack patience to work toward shared understanding. This can be a particular issue during synchronous online learning if the sound quality is poor. Students with English as their first language may not have reflected on how privileged they are to have a language that is so dominant internationally. These issues are also common in other HEIs (Mallman et al, 2019).

POSSIBLE ACTION: Extended induction processes with team building and discussion of typical class types could be valuable to begin to address some of these concerns. Also, consider alternative forms of teaching. Make sure all students are aware of available language support and have realistic workloads so they can take advantage of this support.

8) **Inexperienced teachers and international learners:** I have been learning about some examples in the University where new teachers are quickly recruited to respond to unexpectedly large cohorts of international students. These teachers do sometimes seem then to be expected to teach these cohorts well with little time to develop their teaching practices. They may also have precarious contractual status and high workloads.

   POSSIBLE ACTION: Build additional time into these teachers' workloads to allow them to engage with CPD for learning and teaching. Schools liaise with IAD about the forms of CPD that would work best for their new teachers.

9) **Space and support for CPD for experienced teachers to respond to diverse cohorts**
   If our experienced teachers are to learn more about internationalising the curriculum and about supporting the learning of our international students, then they need time do so. Although some simple tips may help, doing this work well involves deep critical reflection and the redesign of courses and programmes. Even before the pressures of the pandemic, many experienced colleagues reported having little time to engage with CPD for learning and teaching despite being interested in it.

POSSIBLE ACTION: Build additional time into workloads to allow experienced teachers to engage with and lead on CPD for learning and teaching. Build on recent discussions about considering teaching in annual review to ensure all teachers are supported to engage.

Risk management

There are potential risks to the University's reputation and international recruitment if some international students experience problems in their learning experiences.

Equality and Diversity

Taking up the possible actions suggested in this paper should enhance equality and diversity. An Equality Impact Assessment will be conducted if actions are decided on by the Committee.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

To be agreed if specific actions arise from the paper.

Author

Professor Vel McCune, Institute for Academic Development.

Freedom of information

This paper is open.

Presenter

Professor Vel McCune, Institute for Academic Development.

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If you would like this paper in an alternative format, please contact:
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Senate Education Committee

18 November 2020

OfS NSS Consultation

Description of paper
This paper summarises the University of Edinburgh response to the Office for Students (OfS) Review of the National Student Survey (NSS)[1].

Action requested / recommendation
SEC are asked to discuss the consultation. No action is required (the consultation closed on Friday 13th November).

Background and context
The Office For Students (OfS) have launched a consultation on the NSS. The consultation was prompted by the Department for Education (DfE) paper: *Reducing bureaucratic burden in research, innovation and higher education.*[2] Students Unions have been asked to participate in a separate consultation exercise which has been run alongside the provider exercise.

The terms of reference the OfS have published are:

- Assess the bureaucratic burden the NSS places on providers and how this could be reduced

- Explore the unintended consequences of the NSS for provider behaviour and how these could be prevented, including whether the NSS drives the lowering of academic standards and grade inflation.

- Examine the appropriate level at which the NSS could continue to provide reliable data on the student perspective on their subject, provider and the wider system, and what could be done without depending on a universal annual sample.

- Examine the extent to which data from the NSS should be made public, including the implications of Freedom of Information (FoI) legislation.

- Ensure the OfS has the data it needs to regulate quality effectively.

- Ensure the NSS will stand the test of time, and can be adapted and refined periodically to prevent gaming.

- Ensure the UK wide role of the survey is considered in any recommendations

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[1] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-information-and-data/national-student-survey-nss/review-of-the-national-student-survey/
[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-bureaucratic-burdens-higher-education/reducing-bureaucratic-burdens-on-research-innovation-and-higher-education

Discussion
The draft response (correct on 11th November 2020 – may be amended before final submission) is available in the Appendix.

The consultation for providers focus on the level of burden created by running the NSS; how universities and students use NSS data and a proposal to survey a sample of students rather than all eligible students.

The key arguments made in the University of Edinburgh response are:

- Compared with other activities that are a regulatory requirement (e.g. the HESA Student Return), the NSS isn't overly burdensome. Removing the NSS and replacing it with an institutional survey or opting into an alternative sector wide survey wouldn't reduce burden and could increase it.
- Whilst the questionnaire flawed, there are advantages in having an instrument like the NSS which provides a stable dataset where we can benchmark performance against other institutions. Proposals to make the NSS opt in or to reduce the number of students in the survey population would reduce the usefulness of NSS data for benchmarking.
- The OfS have asked if workload would be reduced if only a sample were to be used for the NSS. They don't give clarity on what they mean by sampling i.e. if they would be looking to achieve a stratified sample. This is something of a red-herring. Using a smaller population doesn't necessarily reduce workload and would risk a significant reduction in the validity of the data collected.
- Sampling a proportion of final year students would contradict efforts the University of Edinburgh is making to increase participation in Student Voice activities.
- Using a smaller sample would risk the voices of underrepresented student groups going unheard as student numbers in these groups tend to be small (particularly BAME students in some subject areas and Care Leaver / Care Experienced students).
- The NSS is used at University, School, Subject (HECOS) and Programme level as one in a wider basket of measures that help us to understand students' experiences and to quality assure the performance of the University.
- The underlying assumption behind this review is that the NSS leads institutions to reduce their standards in order to receive higher scores. Robust evidence hasn't been provided to support this claim and we would support further research to investigate this.
- There could be an argument for considering the timing of the survey. Final year students don't get to benefit from change made as a result of their feedback but neither do they have the opportunity to reflect on the value gained from their programme and how it positons them in the world of work relative to other graduates.
- The consultation questions don't adequately address the fundamental question of what the NSS is for. If the NSS exists only to provide high level quality assurance to Funders and Government then the proposal to develop a statistically robust sample would work to fulfil that purpose. This would be at the cost of providing a dataset that can be used by universities to understand varying student experiences and help to drive positive changes.

Universities Scotland have made a separate response to the consultation which is in line with the response for the University of Edinburgh.

Resource implications
N/A

Risk management
N/A

Equality & diversity
N/A

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

Author
Paula Webster[3]

Presenter
Paula Webster
Head of Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling

Freedom of Information
Open

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[3] With very helpful contributions from Pauline Manchester and Tracey Slavin

University of Edinburgh Response

Is the NSS used for any of the following purposes at your provider? If so, how helpful is the NSS in its current form for achieving those purposes?
Scale: Very helpful, Helpful, Neither, Unhelpful, Very unhelpful, Don't know / Not used for this purpose

Question	Suggested Response
Understanding the student perspective	Helpful
Identification of areas for improvement	Helpful
Attracting prospective students to your provider / marketing	Neither helpful nor unhelpful
Comparing results against other providers	Helpful
Strategic planning and/or policy making	Helpful
Performance management	Helpful

If the NSS is used for other purposes at your institution not captured here, please briefly describe these below:

The NSS is useful as one measure within a wider set of measures for all these activities. We wouldn't use the NSS as a standalone measure of student satisfaction – or indeed as a standalone measure to inform any of these activities. Whilst the NSS is a useful measure it has well recognised limitations which we bear in mind when considering the insights we gain from the NSS alongside other student opinion metrics.

None of these options explicitly reference Quality Assurance. Our annual Quality Assurance reviews and Periodic Reviews make use of NSS data (again as one indicator within a wider basket of measures).

How much work do the following NSS activities require?
Scale: A small amount of work, A moderate amount of work, a lot of work, prefer not to say

Question	Suggested Response
Identifying students to take part (working on a target list)	A lot of work
Promoting the survey to students to encourage their participation	A moderate amount of work
Administration and running of the survey when live (including interacting with the OfS and Ipsos)	A small amount of work
Analysing NSS data and disseminating it within your provider	A moderate amount of work
Improving the student experience using feedback from the NSS results	A lot of work

Are there any particular issues for your provider which increase workload when delivering the NSS? (Please tick all that apply)

- *Many of our courses run with very small cohorts of students*
- *Our students are hard to reach during the survey window (e.g. in vocational settings / field work / abroad)*
- *Our students are reluctant to engage with surveys*
- *We need to coordinate the survey across multiple campuses / faculties / franchises*
- *The NSS conflicts with other activities at our provider*
- *My provider does not have enough resource for NSS activities*
- *Only a small proportion of our student body is eligible for the NSS*
- ***Other (please specify):***

Preparing the NSS population ahead of the survey can be a lot of work in our institution due to some internal business processes however we don't think this is a reason not to undertake the survey.

If the NSS did not take place, how likely is it that your provider would do any of the following in its place?
Scale: Not at all likely, somewhat likely, very likely, don't know

Question	Suggested Response
Replace it with a new provider-wide survey created by your university or college	*Somewhat likely*
Replace it with an externally available student survey in addition to any existing survey activity	*Somewhat likely*
Run additional student forums or focus groups	*Somewhat likely*
Nothing	*Not at all likely*

In which other undergraduate surveys does your provider currently participate? (Please tick all that apply)

- *UK Engagement Survey (UKES)*
- *Student Barometer / International Student Barometer*
- *Student Academic Experience Survey (SAES)*
- *Times Final Year Student Survey / What Uni / Which?*
- *We run our own whole provider student survey*
- ***None***

In your view, do the benefits of the NSS to your provider outweigh the work associated with running the survey?

- *Yes, the benefits heavily outweigh the workload*
- ***Yes, the benefits slightly outweigh the workload***
- *Neutral, the benefits and workload are balanced*
- *No, the workload slightly outweighs the benefits*
- *No, the workload heavily outweighs the benefits*
- *Don't know/ not applicable*

If the NSS was optional, how likely is it that your provider would participate?

- *My provider is very likely to participate*
- *My provider is likely to participate*
- *My provider is not likely to participate*
- *My provider is very unlikely to participate*
- ***Don't know***

Would the workload for your provider be reduced if the NSS only sampled?:
Scale: Yes, a significant reduction in workload, slight reduction, unchanged, slightly increased, significantly increased, don't know

Question	Suggested Response
5% of the number of students it currently does each year?	Significantly increased
25% of the number of students it currently does each year?	Significantly increased
50% of the number of students it currently does each year?	Significantly increased
75% of the number of students it currently does each year?	Significantly increased

To what extent is NSS data useful for improving the student experience when provided at: Scale: Not useful, slightly useful, very useful, don't know

Question	Suggested Response
Whole provider level	Slightly useful
Department level	Very useful
Subject level	Very useful
Course level* subject to meeting data publication thresholds	Slightly useful
By student group (e.g. POLAR, Demographics, etc)	Very useful

If NSS data were no longer available at course level, would this:
Scale: Strongly agree, agree, neither, disagree, strongly disagree, don't know

Question	Suggested Response
Negatively impact your ability to use NSS data to improve the student experience?	Agree
Reduce the usefulness of NSS data for prospective students?	Neither agree nor disagree
Reduce the usefulness of the NSS for public accountability	Neither agree nor disagree

If providers were limited to only accessing their own data (and not data from other providers), would this impact on the usefulness of NSS data?

- *Yes, this would have a positive impact*
- ***Yes, this would have a negative impact***
- *There would be no impact*
- *Not sure/ don't know*
- *Other (please specify)*

17. If provider access to data were limited only to whole-provider level (i.e. not at course or subject level), would this impact on the usefulness of NSS data?

- *Yes, this would have a positive impact*
- ***Yes, this would have a negative impact***
- *This would not have an impact*
- *Not sure / Don't know*
- *Other (please specify):*

Do you have any comments about a potential reduction in the availability of published NSS data?

Being able to benchmark our performance against other institutions at a subject level is what gives the NSS value for our institution. Reducing the sample size would reduce the robustness of data at this level which would, in turn, reduce its value.

We have concerns about the proposal to draw a sample and survey only a proportion of students. The NSS is one of our Student Voice activities and in all other areas we are actively promoting participation and getting as full representation as possible.

We also have concerns that the voices of underrepresented student groups would go unheard if a sample were used. There are small numbers of students from BAME backgrounds in some subject areas across the sector as well as relatively small numbers of students in important groups like Care Leaver / Care Experienced or estranged students and we would risk receiving no feedback on these students' experiences.

To what extent to you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Scale: Strongly agree, agree, neither, disagree, strongly disagree, don't know / N/A

Question	Suggested Response
Student responses to the NSS are influenced by the most recent grades	Disagree
Overall, the NSS has contributed to improving the student experience	Agree
The NSS creates pressure on providers to inflate the grades of students	Disagree
The NSS is a useful means for ensuring provider accountability	Neither agree nor disagree
The NSS helps applicants make better informed choices	Disagree
Academic standards are negatively influenced by the NSS	Disagree

20. If you have any further comments on the NSS or this review, please offer these below:

We have answered that we agree that the NSS has contributed to improving the student experience. The NSS has flaws and any one size fits all questionnaire will never work to reflect the different contexts in which universities work, however having a high profile survey does place more of a spotlight on student experiences – that isn't to say that concerns around student experiences would be ignored if the NSS didn't exist – but it probably helps.

This consultation doesn't address the fundamental issue – what is the NSS for? If it is to help universities to understand, and where necessary, intervene to improve student experiences then the content of the questionnaire could be reviewed again. There is, however, value in having a stable question set that can allow for comparisons over time.

If the NSS exists to provide funders and government with a performance metric that allows quality assurance of the sector – as currently used in SFC Outcome Agreements - then proposals to use a smaller sample and not publish results would meet that purpose. There would be a significant reduction in transparency and we would lose the detail which is useful for institutions. It shouldn't be underestimated how much more effort needs to go into getting defined sample populations to complete a survey than to survey a whole population. Without the data that makes the NSS useful, institutions would have little incentive to invest resource into delivering the survey.

A key assumption behind the survey review appears to be that the existence of NSS leads institutions to reduce their standards in order to receive higher scores. Whether true or not, it is not clear that robust evidence has been provided for this claim. We would propose that this piece of research needs to be carried out before sweeping changes to the NSS are made that undermine its validity as a method of identifying student experiences. There is a big difference between identifying that student experiences should be improved as a result of survey results, and reducing the standard of assessment to garner more positive scores. The former has been a positive benefit of the survey and while there is a valid hypothesis that harder courses might gain lower scores in some areas, until evidence of a causal link is presented we would be cautious about suggesting changes to address this.

There may be an argument for considering the timing of the survey. Does the timing, around the point of final studies, allow students to reflect on the value gained from their programme? It does not help them consider how it positions them in the world of work or relative to other graduates. Consideration could be given to the timing, perhaps aligning or integrating with the Graduate Outcomes survey.

Senate Education Committee

18 November 2020

Student Mental Health Strategy Update

Description of paper:
1. The University continues to experience significant growth in demand for support for students with mental health difficulties. The Student Mental Health Strategy (SMHS) was approved by LTC in January 2017, and an implementation group continues to oversee the delivery of the University's plans to manage this situation and enhance the University's offer of support to students, as well as taking a strategic approach and making plans for action and activity required to respond to continuing growth in demand. This paper seeks to update SEC on this work.

Action requested / recommendation:
2. SEC is asked to consider this paper for information and discussion.

Background and context:
3. Following the Learning and Teaching Committee's approval of the Student Mental Health Strategy in January 2017, the University's multi-stakeholder group has been meeting three times a year to take forward the implementation of the strategy over the three year period between 2017 and 2020, with a focus on the strategy's two main aims:
   a. Through implementing the actions, policies and processes outlined in the strategy to ensure that the University is recognised as a community that promotes the good mental health of its students and treats all students with respect and empathy.
   b. Ensure that students who experience mental health difficulties at the University of Edinburgh are well supported.

4. The Strategy Implementation Plan was refreshed in 2018/19 and aligned with the Universities UK (UUK) 'whole-university approach' outlined within the Step Change Framework, with 4 key delivery areas identified:
   a. Prevention, early intervention and building communities.
   b. Promoting positive mental health and wellbeing and communicating effectively with the University community.
   c. Support, resources, care, policies and process.
   d. Data, measurement and evaluation.

Academic Year 2020/21:
5. As the University moved into academic year 2020/21, the key strategic objectives for the ongoing implementation of the Student Mental Health Strategy were to:
   a. Enhance and scale-up the University of Edinburgh's student mental health and wellbeing services in order to meet rapidly growing demand.
   b. Through the Personal Tutor and Student Support Review, re-engineer the University's systems for supporting students and develop a Student Wellbeing Service (located within Schools and Deaneries) to enable

students to establish and maintain positive wellbeing within a 'whole-institution' approach.

c. Ensure that there are robust and seamless pathways for students with deteriorating mental health and wellbeing from first point of contact within accommodation (Residence Life) or academic schools/ deaneries (student support teams or PTs) into University services and, where required, through to specialist NHS mental health services.

The plan for the delivery of these strategic objectives had five main elements:

a. Utilise the funding (i) provided by Scottish Government and (ii) approved through the Student Experience Action Plan (StEAP).

b. Engage fully to shape and influence the delivery of the Personal Tutor and Student Support Review.

c. Use the new opportunities for service enhancement delivered through the planned move (in March 2020) of the main base for the Student Counselling and the Student Disability Service to the Health and Wellbeing Centre (HWC).

d. Lead the Edinburgh Thrive Students initiative and engage with the strategic Universities Scotland (US) and UUK work to enhance student mental health services and develop integrated service pathways with NHS partners.

e. Review the Student Mental Health Strategy within the UUK Step Change framework.

Impact of the Global Pandemic:

6. However, the CV19 global pandemic meant that since March 2020, the landscape has shifted significantly. The University has pivoted to a 'hybrid' operating model, and all student wellbeing services have needed also to pivot in order to deliver accessible interventions to enhance the student experience within this model. The funding through StEAP has been reduced; the University's 'recruitment freeze' has delayed recruitment to counselling posts; the move to the HWC was delayed until August 2020 and the teams have not been able to use the space in the ways they had planned; the implementation of the Personal Tutor and Student Support Review has been delayed until at least 2021(meaning a delay in the development of the University's Wellbeing Service); the US and UUK work on student pathways has been delayed; and the review of the University Student Mental Health Strategy has been slightly delayed.

7. The Office for Students briefing note on Student Mental Health (April 2020) emphasises the need for increased capacity within student mental health services, as well as increased service flexibility and agility so that services can continue to pivot effectively to support students engage with hybrid models of teaching delivery. The coronavirus pandemic has dramatically changed students' day-to-day lives. Teaching activity has moved online, there are significant changes to assessment, and many students are no longer living in their term-time housing, or indeed may be abroad. The experience of being a student at University has become more complex and pressured in itself, meaning that enhanced and accessible student support is needed even more than previously.

8. This all required a strong focus on ensuring the University's Services pivoted to delivering excellent support within the hybrid model. Aspects of University service

provision are referenced within the OfS good practice case studies. The Scottish Government has made regular reference during the pandemic to the significant 'mental health legacy' of Covid 19, and the negative impact that is having on people's mental health and wellbeing. Recognising the need for enhanced mental health and wellbeing support, Scottish Government has recently invested significantly increased funding in specialist NHS mental health services, as well as launching the 'Clear Your Head' communications campaign and providing more resources for Universities to deliver student counselling and wellbeing support.

9.   A number of key organisations have indicated that demand for counselling and mental health services will continue to rise as a result of the global pandemic (including Scottish Government, NHS, AMOSSHE, HUCS and AUCCCD). This is reflected in current research published by the University of Sheffield, which shows that depression and anxiety tripled during the lockdown- with younger adults (aged 18-25) being a particular "at risk" group.

10.   Other Existing and emerging evidence demonstrates that the impact of the Covid 19 global pandemic on people's mental health and wellbeing has caused more prevalent poor mental health, as well as increased levels of social isolation, emotional challenges, pressure, loss, anxiety and depression. This all means that the need for support is growing, despite there being less students physically 'on-campus'. The fact that students studying at the University across the globe can engage with all of our services 'remotely' means that we have never actually been more accessible, and this is reflected in activity and demand patterns.

11.   Looking after students' mental health and wellbeing is crucial in helping them to succeed and benefit from their higher education. All students are likely to require increased pastoral support and resources to support their wellbeing during and following this global pandemic, and the University of Edinburgh has pivoted very well to develop a strong hybrid model for delivering a wider range of counselling and support interventions in a blended way: both digitally/ remotely and on-campus, face to face. UUK continues to promote a 'whole-university approach' to student mental health and wellbeing within the recent Mentally Health Universities report.

Review of the Student Mental Health Strategy:
12.   The Strategy is due for review this year, and as outlined above, this has been delayed due to the pandemic. The Wellbeing Services management team has started the review by competing an initial SWOT analysis, and this work will now be extended out to the wider Implementation Group so that all members can engage with the process during the next phase. A number of key documents and themes need to be integrated into the review of the Strategy, including:
   a.   UUK Mentally Healthy Universities report
   b.   Alignment of student wellbeing and staff wellbeing
   c.   Impact of and lessons learned from the global pandemic
   d.   UUK report- Principles and Considerations: Emerging from Lockdown
   e.   Alignment with Think Positive's Student Mental Health Agreement project

Discussion:

13. In order to respond effectively to the global CV19 pandemic, all of the University of Edinburgh Wellbeing Services have pivoted to offering a hybrid model of student support and a range of accessible interventions for students. This involved a significant programme of staff development and training, as well as significant support from ISG in order to ensure that all staff can deliver their function from home. Since September 2020, all Wellbeing Services have phased in and scaled up the delivery of 'on-campus, face to face' interventions for students to complement online and telephone service delivery.

14. Scottish Government has developed the Consistent Core of Care for students during the pandemic, and the University Wellbeing Services continue to work closely in partnership with colleagues from across the University community to ensure all elements of this are met. Part of this has been to ensure that all students who are self-isolating have regular 'check in' phone calls, and that situations where University staff are concerned about a student's mental health or wellbeing are escalated to University Wellbeing Services. The University Listening Service has now moved to operating 24/7, and aims to respond on the same day to escalated situations.

Strengthening Student Support During the Pandemic:

15. Following lockdown in March 2020, Andy Shanks joined the RSAS sub strand of ART Student to lead of work in 'Student Support, Community and Sense of Belonging'. A sub group was comprised of key staff working in these areas and objectives were identified including:
    a. Creation of the Personal tutor & student support staff guiding principles to reflect new hybrid teaching including defining the high level 'student support' and 'personal tutor' offers with a clear focus on best practice and provide clear information on models of accessible and visible support.
    b. A services guide created for all central services from September 2020 to inform staff in Schools, Deaneries and Colleges of new, existing and cancelled activities in each area.
    c. A suite of toolkits created for staff in student facing roles. The toolkits are designed to be easily accessible covering a range of topics including Maintaining Boundaries; Supporting Students who are Self-Isolating; Challenging Covid19 experiences; Supporting International Students and many more. These have been particularly well-received across the University, and will be updated to reflect new situations in the pandemic as well as extended into BAU. The toolkits have been located within the Student Support Professional Development Framework, which was itself developed by a multi-disciplinary group within the University as a hub for all training and development opportunities for student support staff.
    d. A group of core student support staff from across the University started meeting in March 2020 to ensure that the University's student support function had sufficient resilience through the pandemic. Eight months on, this group has grown to over 100 members and meets monthly for updates from central services; discussion on current issues relating to student support; and continuing to be a valuable space for staff to share concerns and situations. The plan is to keep this group going as a good lesson learned piece of work.

e. [Specific information](#) for students and staff regarding self-isolation has been developed, including information on (a) the mental health and wellbeing support available; and (b) the programme of activities which students can access, and which has been developed by partners from across the University community, including Residence Life, Students' Association, Sports Union and Chaplaincy.

Range of Services Delivered:

16. While the number of students studying at the University of Edinburgh has grown to over 44,500, in common with trends at other UK universities, there has been a significant increase in the volume of students at the University of Edinburgh (a) declaring a mental health condition to the Student Disability Service (SDS)- over a 5 year period, this has risen from 598 to 1400 a rise of 134%; (b) coming forward for mental health support: referrals to the UoE Student Counselling Service (SCS) have increased by 262% over nine years up to 2019/20; and (c) approaching the Listening Service for support- demand has trebled over three years. This rise in demand is due to a combination of local and national factors, which is consistent with the experience in other UK Higher Education Institutions and the wider education sector.

17. The factors outlined above have contributed to a picture locally whereby the University has needed to enhance the range and volume of support offered at the University. Over a number of years SCS has developed its model of service delivery in order to respond to the local context and meet rising demand. This has involved developing a model where students are offered a programme of interventions and support which matches their assessed needs (based on the principles of "stepped care"), and consistently growing and enhancing the offer of the range of interventions (from low-intensity through to high-intensity) available to students, including for example (a) increasing capacity for the provision of individual counselling (over 6 sites) and psycho-educational groups; (b) providing access for students to a range of on-line platforms (including TogetherAll, Silvercloud and the Felling Good app- all of which have thousands of users within the University), bibliotherapy, group support and guided self-help programmes; and (c) developing the role of the Student Mental Health Co-ordinator to support students with significant mental health problems (those with acute, complex and/ or enduring needs) who are in urgent situations and who may require support from NHS mental health services.

18. Within the Student Disability Service, the volume of students being supported through the mental health mentoring (MHM) scheme has risen to 227 students (over 550 hours of support being delivered each month), with another 79 currently working through the assessment and who are expected to receive ongoing MHM support for the year. The MHM team has no current waiting list and has additional capacity to meet demand. In the three years from 2015/16 to 2017/18 there was a significant increase in the hours provided as the service became more widely known. In 2015/16, 55 students were supported.

19. In order to enhance and scale up the MHM service, as well as reducing waiting times, a number of service improvements have been made:

    a. Provision of evening mental health mentor sessions to make more effective use of available meeting space- this enabled the service to increase the staffing/hours to meet demand.
    b. Provision of a single manager for MHM staff, tasked with developing clear operational frameworks for this group of staff to work within.
    c. Focus on staff development, clinical supervision and peer support systems for this group of staff to facilitate professional development.
    d. Offering a clearer commitment around the number of hours expected over the academic year, enabling staff to feel more confident and more likely to continue to remain working for SDS.
    e. Introduction of group sessions to enhance service provision and reduce waiting times.
    f. Introduction of a more robust support provision with a defined assessment period at the start of the relationship, a move to fortnightly sessions augmented by group work and a focus on the transitions out of the service/ University.
    g. Diversification and enhancement of the range of ways in which support can be delivered, including "walking" sessions which was not previously available as an intervention.

20. The feedback the MHM service receives from students is excellent, many reporting it being the critical factor in them continuing to study and in their perception of doing well and thriving. There is currently have no waiting list, and staff are clearer around boundaries, which means that staff can escalate students of concern more quickly and in a more consistent way. This enables the team to concentrate on the key MHM role, which is to support academic progression.

21. Mental health and wellbeing support also continues to be offered by the Residence Life Service, EUSA services (including the Advice Place, Peer Mentoring and Nightline) and Student Support Teams working within Schools. Residence Life moved to be managed through Student Experience Services in August 2020- this delivers better levels of integration of student wellbeing services within the University, and delivers more seamless care and support for students. Since the beginning of semester 1 2020/21 Residence Life have responded to 245 welfare reports (covering students presenting with any level of risk behaviour), 41 of which have required a more intensive intervention. The team has proactively contacted 312 students who disclosed 'mental health' as a disability on application to accommodation. Residence Life have held 404 events so far this semester, with 4241 attendees, as well as heavily promoting EUSA, Chaplaincy and Centre of Sports and Exercise events.

22. There has been a continued focus on prevention and mental health promotion: actively promoting positive wellbeing across the University community, including lower-intensity interventions such as "Therapets" sessions, self-management materials, and mindfulness apps and resources being promoted by SCS. Schools and Deaneries continue to run wellbeing events. SCS runs a psycho-educational group drop-in programme called Skills for Life and Learning, which focuses on relevant student issues, such as anxiety-management and procrastination- 188

students attended these groups last year, and they are now being moved online. The Centre for Sport and Exercise has continued to deliver a range of interventions, including the Active Lives programme and Stressbusters. Partnership working across all services is crucial to delivering integrated and seamless mental health and wellbeing support within the University.

23. The Chaplaincy has increased the volume and range of [Mindfulness](#) interventions (and now has a Mindfulness Chaplain, whose work is gaining significant traction across the University community) and the [Listening Service](#), as well as introducing regular yoga and tai-chi sessions into the range of support offered. The numbers of staff and students engaging with the Mindfulness resources has continued to grow monthly- this includes the weekly Mindletter; Mindfulness recordings; virtual drop-ins; student courses; and staff course. The Listening Service now operates 24/7 in response to the pandemic, with clear systems in place for staff to escalate students of concern. The Chaplaincy has worked closely with the Students' Association to deliver two series of the #LetsTalk [podcast](#) (focusing on student and staff mental health and wellbeing themes), which has over 2500 downloads.

<u>Student-led Initiatives:</u>

24. The Students' Association and the Sports Union have continued to prioritise student-led initiatives where mental health is the main focus, and this has worked particularly well during a scaled up, joint Mental Health and Wellbeing Week in November 2019 when an impressive range of events was delivered. Key statistics/ evaluation from the evaluation include:
    a. 66 events and activities took place
    b. Presence on all major campuses (George Square, King's Buildings, Edinburgh College of Art, Little France, Moray House and Easter Bush) as well as Pleasance, Pollock Halls Accommodation, and online
    c. Students and staff in 13 Schools ran events - the most active School was Moray House (for the second year in a row)
    d. 44% of events were student-led
    e. 89% of event organisers would suggest running their event again in future Mental Health and Wellbeing Weeks
    f. "Love the pack I received from Student Support for my event and I love the #letstalk hashtag. Can't believe how many events are available it's really amazing! Well done Edinburgh!"
    g. "I think the organisation of the week has been excellent, the engagement has been strong and the work and dedication in to raising awareness of mental health over a diverse portfolio of students and locations is invaluable and commendable."
    h. "Tying in our [events] with Mental Health Week was very useful for us as organisers as we were able to reach students who we were interested in including in our [events] but who might have otherwise not known about [them]."

25. The Mental Health and Wellbeing programme has been extended to 3 weeks from Monday 9 November. [#LetsTalk](#) Mental Health and Wellbeing comprises training opportunities, workshops, taster sessions and putting existing wellbeing services front and center of university life. This will be a mostly digital offering due to the pandemic.

Core Themes for 2020:
   a. Coming together and combatting loneliness during the Covid-19 pandemic
   b. Raising awareness of existing support and initiatives available to students; myth busting of common misconceptions to equip them with the necessary skills to manage their mental health
   c. Diversifying the conversation around mental health and wellbeing, focusing on marginalised students and staff experiences of mental health and wellbeing
   d. Supporting each other, learning the skills to be able to support your colleagues, flatmates, friends and course mates

26. A key aspect of the past 4 years of Mental Health and Wellbeing Week has been School involvement and student-led activity. In order to support event holders with social distancing, a key contact at the Students' Association has created enhanced guidance documents for event holders as well as run frequent digital "office hours" where event holders can receive one-to-one support.

Cross-Campus Provision:
27. While key services continue to be located centrally (Bristo Square), significant outreach activity is maintained across the University Campus, with, prior to the pandemic, SDS operating over five sites, SCS delivering interventions across six sites and Chaplaincy having capacity to support students across eight different locations within the University campus (including the main Chaplaincy Centre). At present, SCS, SDS and Chaplaincy are operational at Bristo Square and King's Buildings.

28. Both SCS and SDS moved into the Health and Wellbeing Centre (HWC) at 7 Bristo Square when this opens in August 2020- this was delayed significantly due to the global pandemic. While all services can now deliver interventions remotely, the HWC increases the services' overall capacity for individual interventions by 12 rooms (an increase of 50% on current capacity), and provides 3 additional larger rooms where group interventions can be delivered, as well as the Wellbeing Lounge. Due to the pandemic, unfortunate it has not yet been possible to use either the Wellbeing Lounge or the meeting rooms.

29. Looking ahead, when services are able to use the HWC to its full capacity, the relocation of the both SDS and SCS to the Centre alongside the existing (NHS) Health Centre and the University Pharmacy brings opportunities to promote health and wellbeing from a central hub in a more strategic way, and to develop services further, as well as introducing a greater emphasis on awareness, prevention and early intervention for the whole University community.

Quality and Impact of Provision:
30. While the quality of support provided to students with mental health issues continues to be high, there remains an incorrect perception within parts of the University community that waiting times for SCS are high. SCS uses three outcome measures, two of which are clinical and outcomes-focused, and the third of which is a service evaluation. Full details are available with the SCS Annual Report. These measures demonstrate that:

Of students who completed the outcomes-focused evaluation:
- 79% say counselling helped them stay at university
- 87% say counselling helped them helped develop skills that might be useful in obtaining future employment?
- Counselling improved the experience of university for 86%
- CORE outcomes from 2019-20: 66% of all users (completing CORE) showed recovery and improvement (the average over the past five years is 65.5%)
- 98.5% of students who completed the service evaluation are satisfied with the service.

31. The feedback both from the psycho-educational group programme and from students on the PAWS "Therapets" events (organised by SCS each academic year) remains very positive.

32. In relation to waiting times, a continued and significant focus on service performance and triage by the SCS Director has meant that during 2019/20, 93% of students who referred themselves to SCS have been seen within four weeks. This was achieved within the context of the service running with counselling vacancies. Given that SCS was not able to recruit to vacancies, nor to use Scottish Government funding, due to the University's recruitment freeze, service performance in this area has been excellent, especially when compared to waiting times for statutory and third sector counselling and psychological services in Edinburgh.

33. SDS introduced the 'My Accessible Learning Portal' (Unihub) in September 2020, and this allows students to register with SDS, complete pre-registration questionnaires, check status of request/ contact and book directly into an appropriate appointment with a Disability Advisor at a time that suits their availability. Previously this was a manual email process with a large number of emails going between the service and the student with many points of delay or failure possible. Typically it could have taken between 3 and 7 days for a student who registered with the service and who submitted appropriate evidence to be in a position to agree an appointment date. With My-Accessible-Learning portal this is now taken around 24 hrs for a student to be offered an appointment slot which they can book online. This has meant that 3-5 days have been removed from the process for students, they can book a time that works for them and SDS are able to send automatic reminders about the appointment date/ time.

34. Qualitative and qualitative feedback on and evaluation of all services delivered by the Chaplaincy is very positive and is covered fully within their Annual Report.

Training:
35. It has been widely acknowledged that the volume of mental health training available to University staff needed to be scaled up. Assistant Principal Murray has continued to endorse the delivery of a mental health training programme for staff across the University's Schools, delivered by staff from SCS and SDS. Initially this was targeted at Personal Tutors, but as take up of spaces was low, this has now been expanded to other University staff.

36. In Semester 1 2019 the team offered 7 (210 places) training sessions to individual schools on the Student Mental Health training programme aimed at PTs and student support teams, this training was aimed at specific school and required a minimum of 10 participants to take place. We were only able to deliver 1 session to 12 people in that period, as individual schools where unable to provide the minimum numbers of participants.

37. In semester 2 we opened this training up to "all staff" to attend and bookable through Myed, but still encouraging PT's and SSO's as the primary groups to attend. This model quickly was effective, with all 7 sessions fully booked and a wait list of over 200. The 1st face to face session had 25 participants, which was a significant increase on previous trainings with an average of 12-16 participants. With COVID-19 restrictions we moved this training online, and this has allowed us to continue to deliver this crucial training programme.

38. Since April 2020 we have:
    a. Delivered 13 online Student Mental Health training sessions
    b. To 268 staff with an average of 21 staff per session
    c. This is a 2000% increase on our numbers in Semester1 and a 100% increase on 18/19 academic year (118)
    d. The feedback is generally very good and many people like the online delivery which allows a more flexible option to attend centrally delivered training.
    e. There has been an increase in the volume of academic staff attending.

39. The University continues to work closely in partnership with the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust (CWMT, whose on-line mental health training modules are currently available for generic use), firstly promoting the excellent online materials, and secondly, to develop a bespoke module for University of Edinburgh personal tutors through a generous endowment. University staff have worked closely with CWMT to run sessions to promote the materials widely, and plans are in place to roll out a third tranche of these sessions remotely.

Growth in Demand- Resourcing:
40. As outlined above, SCS, SDS and Chaplaincy have all experienced consistent and continued growth in demand during recent academic years. This pattern has continued during semester 1 of this academic year, and there is increasing demand also within Residence Life. In order to manage demand, SDS received increased investment of £53k over three years to recruit an additional 1.0 fte Disability Adviser over three years through the Student Experience Action Plan (StEAP).

41. Plans to increase capacity within SCS through StEAP did not come to fruition through a reduction in the funding available. However, approval has recently been given to recruit to 1.8 fte core-funded counselling posts, as well as 3.71 fte (for three years) counselling posts through the Scottish Government initiative to enhance counselling support for students. SCS have been working with the University's HR and Legal Departments in order to recruit BAME counsellors- this is part of the University's Race Equality and Anti-Racism Strategy. Planning for a pilot project is also taking place with the University's Procurement Team to out-source a proportion of SCS in order (a) to provide more choice for BAME students; as well as (b) ensuring students studying in other time-zones have enhanced

flexibility regarding the timing of their counselling; and (c) additional capacity can be delivered at busy points in the year. This project will be funded through StEAP and evaluated in partnership with colleagues from Procurement.

42. A range of other strategies are also being planned in order to meet the continued projected growth in demand (the lower growth projection is 8% annually) and to ensure that there continues to be a suite of evidence-based interventions available to students who refer themselves to SCS with a range of different psychological needs, from those who need to access on-line resources to maintain positive mental wellbeing to those who require 1:1 counselling sessions. These include:

   a. Scaling up the volume of psycho-educational groups, and moving them online.
   b. Recommissioning TogetherAll for all staff and students.
   c. Continuing to invest in Mindfulness activity, including the Mindfulness Chaplain, who has been recruited for 3 years with StEAP funding.
   d. Looking at options to scale up further the Listening Service. A Head of Service has been recruited through StEAP for three years.
   e. Recommissioning Silvercloud, an e-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy module offering support for a range of mental health issues with a focus on clinical outcomes (this contains two programmes- the first is a flexible bank of self-management resources, whilst the second is a modular, guided self-help programme).
   f. Continuing to promote the Feeling Good app within the University community for all staff and students. This is a positive mental health training course which enables users to calm the mind and develop a positive mind-set, facilitating greater emotional resilience to deal more effectively deal with challenges of life. The Feeling Good app won the Herald Higher Education Award 2019 for 'Supporting Student Wellbeing'.
   g. Utilise the space available at the HWC to deliver a 'drop in' function- enhancing accessibility to services.
   h. When able to do so (given the global pandemic) build on benefits and positive impact of SCS therapeutic group interventions, which have been positively evaluated.
   i. Work in partnership with Schools and deaneries to strengthen their student support offer through the implementation of the Personal Tutor and Student Support review, and introducing a Wellbeing Service and wellbeing advisers as part of the evolved model of student support.

43. The Residence Life Service has seen a continued increase this year in the volume of students presenting with severe and complex mental health issues. A Residence Life Mental health Co-ordinator role was introduced last academic year, and this has increased service capacity to respond to and contain complex mental health situations. In order to ensure that the service has the right level of resources to support students and manage risk, an additional Senior Res Life Co-ordinator is being recruited.

Improving Communications:
44. There is a significant volume of communications activity and available information regarding the provision of mental health and wellbeing support delivered through on-line and print channels across the University community, and we are now in a

situation where this is not structured or communicated in a co-ordinated and organised way, which means that pathways and options are confusing for both staff and students. Work has successfully been undertaken in partnership with SRA to design consistent messaging regarding wellbeing, mental health and the support available at the University- from the pre-arrival stage throughout the student journey.

45. Collaboration with CAM and ISG has now taken place to deliver on a user research project so that the Student Mental Health Strategy Communications Plan is fit for purpose, with the key objectives being:

- Firstly, that pathways to support are clear and
- Secondly, to ensure that students and staff have quick and easy access to high quality information on mental wellbeing.

46. The main recommendations following the research are:
   a. Shift focus from providing information to building relationship- students needing support services were looking for someone to speak to over information
   e. Train and support staff-In order to build relationships with students, staff need committed resources, training and support. Mental health training for staff is essential and not currently mandatory for any staff in student facing roles
   f. Provide information to the student in need which is specific to their situation, when they need it rather than in advance
   g. When writing content consider who is reading it and when – the primary audience might be the person looking to give guidance or support rather than the student in need of the support
   h. Train students in skills to identify and address their own needs and embed this into the curriculum with practical activities
   i. Collaborate and share experiments between staff embedding activities in the curriculum.
   j. Explore collaborative design with students to shape programme content and delivery format.

Further work is now taking place in partnership with ISG and CAM to implement these recommendations during this upcoming year.

47. The main student mental health and wellbeing web-landing page for students and staff is: https://www.ed.ac.uk/students/health-wellbeing. This houses links to all of the University's Wellbeing Services, including information how to access support in a crisis and how to help a friend and information on various policies that may be invoked in student wellbeing situations. This area also explains our free sanitary product provision, and a campus map to show where students can access products, as well as links to external partner agencies such as the Consent Collective, iThrive and Fearless Edinburgh. We have a twitter account @UoEDWellbeing and are building up our following with help from CAM. This is a very beneficial tool for sending out instant information on events, updates and wellbeing themed content.

Developing Pathways and Partnerships:

48. There are a number of collaborative projects taking place to improve the student experience:

   a. **Edinburgh Thrive Students:**
      As part of the Thrive Edinburgh Partnership (which is the local multi-agency Mental Health and Wellbeing Partnership), a collaboration has been established in Edinburgh to drive forward plans to improve mental health and wellbeing services for students in the city (this work is referenced within UUK's Healthy Universities report). Representatives from HEIs (the University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University Heriot Watt University, QMU) and local NHS services (Public Health, Strategic Planning and Commissioning, Community Mental Health, Primary Care) have been meeting since May 2019 in order to identify (a) where the gaps are locally in mental health service provision for students in Edinburgh; and (b) how we can improve service quality and outcomes for students. The following deliverables have been identified as a starting point for service improvement, and it is anticipated that successful delivery of these will provide the partnership with a strong platform for future strategic service re-design:

   i. Development of an information sharing protocol.
   ii. An agreed group of senior HEI staff to have access to nhs.net email accounts (so patient/ student information can be shared securely).
   iii. Awareness raising: development of a summary of University mental health and counselling services for NHS colleagues for sharing with GPs and other stakeholders, including Thrive Edinburgh and third sector organisations.
   iv. Agreement on collaborative care pathway across HEIs and NHS mental health services.
   v. Agreed system of data collection for the number of HEI students accessing mental health treatment and care across primary care and specialist mental health services.
   vi. Development of good practice guide for transitions of care (for students with existing community mental health support prior to moving to Edinburgh).
   vii. Improved opportunities for students to access third sector services and other supported self-management initiatives.
   viii. Improve communication, work collaboratively and support GP practices working at the forefront of NHS care for university students.
   ix. Development of plans to collaborate and work in partnership to develop a student mental health pathway and service in the city of Edinburgh.

   b. **Wellbeing in the Curriculum:**
      As part of Colm Harmon's University's wider work on curriculum reform, a multi-disciplinary project has been started to bring together information on good practice within the University where Schools have integrated wellbeing into the curriculum, and also to benchmark with good practice internationally. An event took place in the spring where good practice within the University was shared, and the next phase of this project will be to engage with all Schools and Deaneries to ensure we have comprehensive information for a 'current state analysis'. A short briefing paper will then be submitted to Colm Harmon.

c. **Student Mental Health Research Project:**
StEAP funding had been approved to fund a research project focusing on the impact of the Student Mental Health Strategy. Unfortunately, this funding has been withdrawn. However, it is felt that there is value in developing links with academic colleagues within University Schools so that we can create a mental health research and evaluation network, and then develop a programme of applied mental health research with our students to evaluate the impact of interventions and help inform best practice. Colleagues from across the University community have expressed an interest in this, and in particular, positive links have been established with the Department of Psychiatry within the Medical School.

d. **Duty of Care for Students Living Abroad:**
With an increasing number of students from overseas studying at universities in the UK, Andy Shanks is leading a piece of work with a colleague from Middlesex University on behalf of AMOSSHE (Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education) to develop a set of guiding principles for the sector.

e. **Personal Tutor and Student Support Review:**
The review made a number of strong recommendations which will enhance the student experience and strengthen the student support function within Schools and deaneries through introducing a Wellbeing Adviser role (as part of the evolved model), which will deliver a number of key functions:
   i. Leading on developing a sense of belonging within Schools and Deaneries
   ii. Focusing on mental health promotion
   iii. Setting up systems for prevention and early intervention
   iv. Signposting to mental health and wellbeing services
   v. Case management of students of concern
   vi. Engage with students in distress and escalate to specialist services

It is understandable but unfortunate that the implementation of this review's recommendations has been 'paused' due to the pandemic. The University does not currently hold system-wide activity or demand data for staff delivering a student support function, and this is a significant risk, because it is not possible to quantify or benchmark the work that staff delivering this function undertake. A case management system would resolve this issue, along with several other connected challenges.

Policy and Procedures:

49. The University needs to ensure that its policies and procedures are compassionate and support students who are struggling with their mental health. Work has been completed to review and refresh a number of key policies and procedures:

a. **Critical Student Welfare Procedure:**
The University Procedure for out of hours support for students in private accommodation has been rewritten and is published here. The purpose of the procedure is to ensure that students experiencing a crisis receive timely and appropriate support in a coordinated manner. This policy includes contributions

from UoE Security, Wellbeing Services and Edinburgh Global and provides a list of key contacts for Security staff first responders.

b. Support for Study:

The [Support for Study Policy](#) was refreshed in 2019, but following reports from Schools and Colleges on the system not working, a review is being undertaken of the policy by Student Experience Services and Academic Services. A number of planning session were held before lockdown, and work has progressed including a matrix for staff to follow, case studies and amendments to the policy.

We created [information](#) on the policy for students to make it more accessible.

c. Helping Distressed Students

This [guide](#) has been refreshed to include reference to the pandemic, and to condense it for staff ease of use. It has been distributed not only to staff in Schools and Colleges, but in Edinburgh Global; student finance teams and the new EdHelp hubs.

d. Students Emergency Contact Procedure

This [guidance](#), developed in 2018, was not well known around the University, and so we have proactively promoted it to staff across the University, and it is now used regularly. We also refreshed the guidance in light of the new annual registration policy which makes it mandatory for students to update these details every year. We also worked with students to create a [student-friendly version](#), and with Student Systems to create links to our guidance from the EUCLID system. A series of workshops with students were held on different models of emergency contact which were extremely interesting and relevant to the update of the work.

Governance:

50. The Student Mental Health Strategy Implementation Group will continue to report into the Senate Education Committee through a system of submitting an annual summary of progress in this format. Four-monthly meetings of the group will continue throughout the forthcoming academic year, with the next one planned for December 2020.

Conclusion:

51. A significant volume of activity has taken place within the framework of the implementation of the Student Mental Health Strategy during the past twelve months. Key priorities will continue to be:

   a. Review of the Student Mental Health Strategy.
   b. The continued scaling up and broadening of the range of evidence-based interventions to ensure that the University is able to respond to students who present with a broad range of mental health needs. This will involve recruitment to funded posts, as well as evaluation of the pilot project to out-source a proportion of SCS service delivery.
   c. Implementation of recommendations of user-research project to enhance communications activity across all channels, and to ensure that students and

staff can easily and quickly access information and advice on guidance on matters related to mental health and wellbeing.

d. Continued review and evaluation of services to ensure they are fully congruent with the hybrid operating model and aligned with University plans for semester 2 and beyond (including with sense of belonging project).

e. Continued evaluation of Student Mental health Training Programme model of delivery.

f. Further development of and delivery on the pathway and partnerships projects outlined at paragraph 48 above.

Resource implications:

52. As demand continues to grow on services within the University supporting students with mental health difficulties, there are likely to be ongoing resource implications, some of which are likely to relate to staffing requirements across all services as evidenced in planning round submissions. There are likely to be other ongoing resource implications relating to training, service growth and enhancement, online support resources and communications.

Risk management:

53. This paper suggests enhancements to current practice and further investment in services. Failure to invest or develop appropriate, enhanced services may lead to negative impacts and outcomes for students with mental health difficulties, for staff who may find it challenging to support these students and to the reputation of the University.

Equality & Diversity:

54. This paper does not propose any amendments to policy or practice. The Student Mental Health Strategy continues to consider the experience of students with a wide range of mental health difficulties, and an EIA will be completed should any of its future activity require this.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed:

55. The Student Mental Health Strategy Group's actions and activity will continue to be reported to Senate Education Committee.

Author and Presenter:
Andy Shanks
Director of Student Wellbeing
October 2020

Freedom of Information
Open paper

Senate Education Committee

18 November 2020

Updating and Embedding the Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy

Description of paper

1. This paper comments on the current Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy and proposes further review. It aims to provoke discussion on the principles the University should embed in its policies, guidance and practice so that its teaching and learning are highly accessible and inclusive.

Action requested / recommendation

2. The Committee is asked to comment on any aspect of the paper and to consider the questions posed within the Discussion section.

Background and context

3. The University's Equality Outcomes Action Plan 2017-2021 places the Committee responsible for two areas. These are promoting and embedding the Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy in standard learning and teaching practice; and delivering on the strategic commitment to embed equality, diversity and inclusion within the curriculum.

4. The current Policy came into force in 2013 and was unchanged following review in 2016. The Policy aims to standardise and mainstream several adjustments that would be of significant benefit to both disabled and non-disabled students. Disabled student support more generally was reviewed in 2017 with recommendations for implementation of adjustments and estate accessibility that included improving communication of the Policy to students.

5. A short-term policy review group has been formed, currently consisting of the Assistant Principals for Academic Standards & QA and Online Learning, the Director of the Student Disability Service, the EUSA VP Education and Disabled Students Officer, two further academic members of staff and a Learning Technology Advisor, with support from Academic Policy Officers.

6. Although there are significant concerns that the Policy has been difficult to implement consistently across the institution, it has nonetheless been cited as an example of good practice[1] in inclusive learning.

7. The University is currently planning a Curriculum Review and a review of its Teaching and Learning Strategy. It recently finalised its 2020/2021 Race Equality and Anti-Racism Action Plan.

Discussion

8. The review group intends next to seek views from disabled students and recent alumni on how the current policy is working.

9. Nonetheless we present some existing criticisms of the Policy:
    a. The Policy provides limited support and leverage for students or staff seeking to address and overcome barriers to implementing adjustments,

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[1] University College Dublin Toolkit for Inclusive Higher Education Institutions, p52

both the mainstreamed adjustments it provides for and more specific adjustments required by an individual student. It does not articulate any process to follow, either in individual situations, or where there are more general systematic or technical barriers to providing or mainstreaming adjustments.

b. The Policy covers a relatively small number of specific measures relating mainly to classroom teaching. It does not, for instance, address research programmes, estates, work placements, study abroad or virtual teaching and it did not anticipate the enormous change in the learning context this year.

c. It makes references to specific technologies that are in danger of going out of date, and has not kept pace with the University's adoption of newer technologies.

d. Maintenance of microphones is largely but not solely the responsibility of Information Services.

e. The word "inclusive" in the title of the Policy strongly suggests its provisions should reflect a much wider understanding of accessibility and of inclusion. To give just two examples, the Policy would not currently cover adjustments for students with caring responsibilities or adjustments for students whose physical location means that their internet bandwidth is restricted.

10. Since the COVID-19 pivot and since digital teaching became the norm, the experience of staff and students with differing levels of technology access, both hardware and software, has made any review of the Policy an enormous task in principle. The move to digital and hybrid has also spotlighted that perhaps not enough questions were asked about physical classroom accessibility in the past, and that the Policy doesn't provide a means to address issues with inaccessible physical teaching spaces.

11. It is clearly vital to try to make sure the playing field is level when so much teaching is now digital. Supporting colleagues in implementing appropriate learning design will remain critical in this context. We recognise that there has recently been a steep learning curve for many teachers, who had not previously taught online programmes or courses, in aligning with School plans and in striking the right balance between asynchronous and synchronous teaching.

12. There may be some common misconceptions circulating about making or mainstreaming adjustments. On one hand, although legislation in principle only requires reasonable best efforts to make adjustments, the Policy might address the risk that pragmatism becomes an excuse for not taking action. On the other hand, increased awareness of accessibility and inclusion requirements among colleagues has led to increased, and often immediate, demand for accessible tools to be procured or developed. The Policy could help ensure that planning and coordination of these changes happens in a reasonable and coordinated manner.

13. In light of the forthcoming strategic reviews noted above, it is suggested for the short term that the Policy be re-worked as a set of principles coupled with detailed guidance. The existing provisions would be updated to form an initial part of the guidance. An important piece of guidance might be a description for students of the process from first setting up adjustments through to how to seek help if adjustments are not being implemented. Further guidance could be added in a modular way.

14. Further investigation may be required to assess, for example, the possibilities for, and barriers to, Course or Programme level accessibility and inclusion audits; how to manage the intricacies of students' rights to self-record teaching; and how to measure the success of the Policy.

15. **Questions**. We intend to ask these questions to disabled student representatives as part of the review process, and to invite them to develop their own questions. The Committee is invited to comment on the questions and to propose further questions that the review should try to answer.

    a. How effective is the current Policy in levelling the playing field and empowering each student in their learning? Where and why is implementation of the current Policy uneven? What are the most important changes needed at present, and what gaps in provision should it address?

    b. Should this Policy be expanded to address "inclusion" more widely? This question should be asked to representatives of other groups in addition to disabled students.

    c. To what extent does and can this University adopt the principles of Universal Design for learning within its curriculum and assessment? What other principles should be adopted?

    d. To what extent is there scope to bring extra-curricular student learning and activity into the principles?

Resource implications

16. Further investigation by the review group will be met from existing resource within ISG, Academic Services, Student Disability Services and EUSA as appropriate.

17. Implications for central and School resource should be assessed before a final proposal is presented to the Committee.

Risk management

18. Review of the Policy should help reduce reputational and compliance risks relating to equality, diversity and inclusion within teaching and learning. It should also inform future strategic reviews.

Equality & diversity

19. This paper and review are part of the effort to improve equality and encourage diversity within the University's teaching and learning.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

20. The views of the Committee will inform the next stage of the short-term review, and the review group will consult and develop proposals to bring to a future meeting.

Author
Neil McCormick
Educational Technology Policy Officer
11 November 2020

Presenter
Tina Harrison
Assistant Principal, Academic
Standards and Quality Assurance

Freedom of Information
Open paper

Senate Education Committee

18 November 2020

Internal Periodic Review Themes 2019/20

Description of paper
1. The paper identifies areas of further development for consideration by Senate Education Committee arising from internal periodic reviews held in 2019/20.

Action requested / recommendation
2. For discussion and response to Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC).

Background and context
3. SQAC (at the annual meeting in September 2020) considered areas of good practice and further development arising from internal periodic reviews held in 2019/20, and agreed responsibilities for action in response.

Discussion
4. The following Internal Periodic Reviews were held in 2019/20: Business School (undergraduate taught); Centre for Open Learning (undergraduate taught); Chemistry (postgraduate and undergraduate taught); Divinity (undergraduate taught); Geography (undergraduate taught); Informatics (postgraduate research); Literatures, Languages and Cultures (postgraduate taught and research); Politics and International Relations (undergraduate taught); Social and Political Science (postgraduate research); Social Policy (undergraduate taught). The individual review reports are available at: https://edin.ac/2Yn59qP

5. In six of the reviews the theme of **Community Building** emerged as an area for further development. Recommendations focused on developing and implementing approaches to improve community building and the impact of pressures on and challenges with the estate on efforts to build community was also noted. The following represent a couple of exemplar recommendations from the reviews:
    *   Business - It is strongly recommended that the identification of appropriate, high quality space for the Business School is prioritised by the College. The lack of capacity to have any undergraduate teaching in the building is likely to continue to be a very significant negative factor in terms of student experience, and act against efforts to build a community of practice.
    *   Divinity - The review team acknowledges feedback received on strong aspects of community identity, but recommends that the School formally consider how best to preserve and further enhance existing levels of inclusivity, bearing in mind all student voices, identities and experiences (e.g. BAME, carers, LGBTQ+ and WP).

- Literatures, Languages and Cultures - The review team was supportive of the School making the case for provision of spaces that cultivate academic interaction and support community building and recommends that the School Management Team pursue this with College. For example, following the move to 50 George Square, the School identified a priority for development by the University Gaelic Plan to reinstate a Gaelic common room, to support Gaelic language students in their language skills and community building.
- Social and Political Science - The review team recommends that the School consider ways in which current study and teaching spaces can be improved to enhance the student experience and consider where any unused spaces could be used as social spaces for students to come together. The Student User group should be involved in these discussions if not already invited to do so.

6. In six of the reviews the **Curriculum** also arose as an area for further development. Recommendations focused on enhancing curriculum development and course provision, embedding and assessing skills, and employability within the core curriculum. The following are exemplar recommendations from the reviews:

   - Centre for Open Learning - The Review Team recommends that the University's Senate Education Committee create opportunities for the Centre of Open Learning to fully embed its activities and broad range of expertise in language teaching, adult education and widening access into the fabric of the institution. The Committee should ensure that COL has a voice in institutional discussions about key projects and planning and help raise its profile within the University, ensuring that the excellent progress made by the Centre's own marketing team can be developed to help it grow sustainably.
   - Divinity - The review team recommends a holistic review of the School's entire UG course provision to ensure appropriate consistency, diversity, timing, constructive alignment, and cumulative volume of assessments across the curriculum. This would include consideration of the impact of assessment practices on all stakeholders (students, academic staff and professional services) when conducting this review and arriving at its conclusions.
   - Geography - The review team recommends that the subject area better communicates employability and personal development opportunities to students and incorporate more external employer engagements as well as greater support for those interested in careers in academia earlier in the student lifecycle.
   - Literatures, Languages and Cultures - The School values its diverse student population but acknowledged there were some challenges in

ensuring all students had the necessary skills, including but not limited to academic English, for postgraduate study. The review team recommends that the College consider how the School can be supported in addressing skills gaps in its postgraduate student population.

- Social and Political Science - The review team recommends that the Subject Area continue to diversify their curriculum and build on the good work that has been done to decolonise and expand course offerings and course reading lists.

Resource implications

7. There are no additional resource implications associated with this paper at this point.

Risk management

8. Failure to respond to areas for further development would constitute an institutional risk.

Equality & diversity

9. The paper itself does not require an Equality Impact Assessment. The Equality Impact Assessment for internal periodic review processes is published at: https://edin.ac/2p3B7WZ

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

10. The Committee's response will be considered at a future meeting of SQAC.

Author

Brian Connolly
Academic Services

Freedom of Information

Open

Senate Education Committee

18 November 2020

National Student Survey (NSS) 2021 – Optional Questions

Description of paper
This paper presents the proposed optional questions for the National Student Survey 2021. These questions will be specifically asked of students at the University of Edinburgh, will appear after the core questions and, unlike the main questionnaire, are not mandatory.

Action requested / recommendation
For approval

Background and context
The NSS is an annual survey of final year undergraduate students and takes place between early February and end of April each year. In September 2020, the Office for Students (OfS) announced that a review of the NSS would be undertaken before the end of this year. The NSS will run in 2021 but OfS has stated that decisions on what data is published will be made once the review has been completed and that institutions in England are no longer required to promote the survey internally. Institutions in Scotland are still required to promote the NSS.

The survey consists of a core questionnaire with mandatory questions as well as optional questions from a bank (see Appendix 2) and/or institutional questions which have been created internally.

Discussion
It is recommended that, given the above from OfS and to allow for trend data to be gathered and analysed, the same two banks of questions are included in NSS 2021 as were included in 2020. Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling has consulted with the Deputy Secretary – Student Experience and EUSA President on this proposal.

Employability and Skills
- My Higher Education experience has helped me plan for my future career.
- My institution offered activities and resources designed to prepare me for the next step in my career.
- The skills I have developed during my time in Higher Education will be useful for my future career.

Student Safety
- I feel safe to be myself at university/college.
- My institution takes responsibility for my safety.

The Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability (SRS) would also like to propose that the following bank of questions is asked in 2021.

Environmental sustainability
- My institution encourages good environmental practice.
- My course has encouraged me to think about environmental sustainability.
- I have had opportunities to take part in activities supporting environmental sustainability.

In April 2020, University Executive approved the Social & Civic Responsibility Plan which sets out strategic objectives including integrating sustainability and the University's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in operations, research, learning and teaching. In addition, the University's Climate Emergency Response Plan (agreed by University Executive Aug 2019) committed to integrating climate change and SDGs into the University curriculum. SRS believe that including these optional questions in the NSS will enable the University to better understand the opportunities students have for sustainability and how the University are delivering in relation to these commitments.

A full list of questions for 2021 has been included at the end. Please note that a full bank of questions must be asked, questions within a bank cannot be selected individually.

The core questionnaire has been included for information (see Appendix 1).

Resource implications
No resource implications

Risk management
Not included

Equality & diversity
Not included

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed
If agreed, the questions will be included in the NSS 2021. The process for including and reporting on these questions will be overseen by Paula Webster, Head of Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling.

Author
Sarah-Jane Brown
28 October 2020

Presenter
Paula Webster

Freedom of Information
Open

Appendix 1 – NSS 2021 Core Questionnaire

Response scale: Definitely agree; Mostly agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Mostly disagree; Definitely disagree; Not applicable

The teaching on my course
1.   Staff are good at explaining things.
2.   Staff have made the subject interesting.
3.   The course is intellectually stimulating.
4.   My course has challenged me to achieve my best work.

Learning opportunities
5.   My course has provided me with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth.
6.   My course has provided me with opportunities to bring information and ideas together from different topics.
7.   My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt.

Assessment and feedback
8.   The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.
9.   Marking and assessment has been fair.
10.   Feedback on my work has been timely.
11.   I have received helpful comments on my work.

Academic support
12.   I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.
13.   I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course.
14.   Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course.

Organisation and management
15.   The course is well organised and is running smoothly.
16.   The timetable works efficiently for me.
17.   Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively.

Learning resources
18.   The IT resources and facilities provided have supported my learning well.
19.   The library resources (e.g. books, online services and learning spaces) have supported my learning well.
20.   I have been able to access course-specific resources (e.g. equipment, facilities, software, collections) when I needed to.

Learning community
21.   I feel part of a community of staff and students.
22.   I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course.

Student voice
23.   I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course.
24.   Staff value students' views and opinions about the course.
25.   It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on.
26.   The students' union (association or guild) effectively represents students' academic interests.

27.   Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course.
28.   Looking back on the experience, are there any particularly positive or negative aspects you would like to highlight?

Appendix 2 - NSS 2021 Bank of Optional Questions

B1. Personal Development
1. The course has helped me to present myself with confidence.
2. My communication skills have improved.
3. As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems.

B2. Students' Union (Association or Guild)
1. The Students' Union (Association or Guild) had had a positive impact on my sense of belonging to the university or college.
2. The Students' Union (Association or Guild) has had a positive impact on the local community.
3. The Students' Union (Association or Guild) has helped me develop useful life skills.

B3. Careers
1. As a result of my course, I believe that I have improved my career prospects.
2. Good advice is available for making career choices.
3. Good advice is available on further study opportunities.

B4. Course Content and Structure
1. All of the compulsory modules are relevant to my course.
2. There is an appropriate range of options to choose from on my course.
3. The modules of my course form a coherent integrated whole. a. Yes (ask all questions in this section)

B5. Work Placements
Did your course involve any work placements?
1. I received sufficient support and advice from my institution about the organisation of my placements.
2. My placements were valuable in helping my learning.
3. My placements have helped me to develop my skills in relation to my course.
4. My placements have helped me to develop my general life skills.
5. The taught part of my course was good preparation for my placements.

B6. Social Opportunities
1. I have had plenty of opportunities to interact socially with other students.
2. I am satisfied with the range of clubs and societies on offer.
3. I am satisfied with the range of entertainment and social events on offer.

B7. Course Delivery
1. Learning materials made available on my course have enhanced my learning.
2. The range and balance of approaches to teaching has helped me to learn.
3. The delivery of my course has been stimulating.
4. My learning has benefited from modules that are informed by current research.
5. Practical activities on my course have helped me to learn.

B8. The Physical Environment
1. Security has been satisfactory when attending classes.
2. My institution provides an appropriate environment in which to learn.

B9. Welfare Resources and Facilities
1. There is sufficient provision of welfare and student services to meet my needs.
2. When needed, the information and advice offered by welfare and student services has been helpful.

B10. Workload
1. The workload on my course is manageable.
2. This course does not apply unnecessary pressure on me as a student.
3. The volume of work on my course means I can always complete it to my satisfaction.
4. I am generally given enough time to understand the things I have to learn.

B11. Assessment
1. Teaching staff test what I have understood rather than what I have memorised.
2. Assessment methods employed in my course require an in-depth understanding of the course content.

B12. Learning Community
1. I feel part of a group of students committed to learning.
2. I have been able to explore academic interests with other students.
3. I have learned to explore ideas confidently.
4. Within my course, I feel my suggestions and ideas are valued.
5. I feel part of an academic community in my college or university.

B13. Intellectual Motivation
1. I have found the course motivating.
2. The course has stimulated my interest in the field of study.
3. The course has stimulated my enthusiasm for further learning.

B14. Entrepreneurial opportunities
1. If I was interested in starting my own business, I know where I could find support in my institution.
2. My Higher Education experience has helped me develop skills that could help me run my own business in future.
3. As a result of my Higher Education experience, I am more likely to consider running my own business in the future.

B15. Employability and skills
1. My Higher Education experience has helped me plan for my future career.
2. My institution offered activities and resources designed to prepare me for the next step in my career.
3. The skills I have developed during my time in Higher Education will be useful for my future career.

B16. Environmental sustainability
1. My institution encourages good environmental practice.
2. My course has encouraged me to think about environmental sustainability.
3. I have had opportunities to take part in activities supporting environmental sustainability.

B17. Student safety
1. I feel safe to be myself at university/college.
2. My institution takes responsibility for my safety.