THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Thematic Review 2017-18:
Mature Students and Student Parents and Carers

Final Report

Executive Summary

The following represents the key findings and recommendations of the review:

Data Collection

- **Key Finding:** Data on student parents and carers is limited.
- **Recommendation:** The University needs a more systematic approach to the collection of data on student parents and carers to provide a baseline understanding of these student cohorts.

Disclosure and Support

- **Key Finding:** Disclosure of caring responsibilities often only happens once there has been an impact on studies.
- **Recommendation:** The University needs a systematic and sensitive disclosure process for student parents and carers with follow-up assessment of needs and appropriate support, advice and guidance.
- **Recommendation:** The University needs a more sympathetic and systematic approach to support with consideration given to a system of reasonable adjustments (covering issues such as extensions and examination arrangements) that are consistent with, but not the same as, those for disabled students.

Flexibility and Understanding

- **Key Finding:** Mature students and student parents and carers often face constraints combining academic demands with career or caring responsibilities that can result in a need for a flexible approach to study.
- **Recommendation:** The University needs to explore options for more flexible part-time provision and embed lecture recording across all academic areas.

Child Friendly Campus

- **Key Finding:** Students with children cite 'child-friendly attitudes' as fundamental to their student experience but do not regard the University as a particularly child-friendly environment.
- **Recommendation:** The University needs to conduct a strategic review of childcare provision, from the provision of child friendly spaces and crèche facilities to nurseries and childcare bursaries.

Report

1. Introduction

1.1 Over the past 40 years the UK Higher Education (HE) sector has undergone significant transformation expanding opportunities beyond the 'traditional' student profile of 18 and 19 year old school leavers. This expansion has been driven by government initiatives to cultivate a highly skilled and globally competitive workforce and promote increased social mobility. These initiatives have led to an increase in mature students (defined as students over the age of 21 at the point of entry) and student parents and carers (defined as students who provide unpaid support to family or friends who could not manage without this help) entering HE with a range of support needs which in some aspects diverge from the provision profile that the HE sector has traditionally been geared towards.

1.2 Recent student campaigns[1] have drawn attention to the inconsistent levels of support provided to mature students and student parents and carers across the HE sector. This inconsistency can often make the difference between students from these groups completing their education or withdrawing. Therefore the aim of the 2017-18 thematic review was to look at the provision of support for these underserved students (i.e. those that either tend not to use the services provided and/or face barriers to access), identify existing good practice and recommend areas for enhancement.

1.3 The review was overseen by a panel convened **Professor Alan Murray,** Assistant Principal Academic Support, with membership as follows: **Brian Connolly**, Academic Services (Review Co-ordinator); **Dr Jeremy Crang,** Dean of Students for the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; **Esther Dominy,** Vice President Welfare, Students' Association (2017-18); **Kai O'Doherty,** Vice President Welfare, Students' Association (2018-19); **Andy Shanks,** Director of Student Wellbeing; **Dr Deborah Shaw,** Senior Tutor, Edinburgh Medical School: Biomedical Sciences; **Jill Stevenson**, Head of Student Support Services, Stirling University (External Member).

2. Methodology

2.1 Due to the heterogeneous nature of the student groups involved the methodological approach agreed by the review panel placed more emphasis on qualitative methods than would usually be the case with student consultations at the University. The panel opted for a more agile and in-depth approach utilizing interviews and small focus groups to drill down under the general sector-wide issues in order to get a better understanding of the specific, practical problems faced by students at Edinburgh.

2.2 The review panel met for the first time in February 2018 to agree the terms of reference, data and evidence for the review panel wiki, and review timelines. The panel also agreed a general email communication which was circulated to student and staff stakeholders across the University announcing the review and consultation plans.

2.3 At the second meeting in March 2018 the review panel invited the three Students' Association representatives for Mature Students, Student Parents, and Student Carers to help identify areas of good practice and issues of concern specific to Edinburgh in the light of feedback they had received in their roles. Utilising this, and recent research from across the sector[2], the panel agreed common themes and

general questions to use as a starting point for consultations with student focus groups.

2.4   Mature students and student parents and carers from across the University were invited to share their experience of support at the University. Focus group sessions were conducted in March 2018 with three sets of students asked about the issues of particular importance to them as well as the themes identified by the panel. The panel also received several responses to a general invitation for comments from the student body that went out via the Students' Associations networks of class reps, newsletter, and social media channels.

2.5   It should be noted that the number of student responses to the consultation was relatively low. For example, only seven students attended the focus group sessions, with several others sending apologies for work or caring related reasons. However, it should also be noted that while small, the number of responses were comparable to the number of students that previous periodic and internal review panels would expect to meet during traditional formal review days (drawn from larger cohorts than those subject to this review). The review panel, and in particular the external member, was content that the findings were in line with similar reviews[3] and research[4] across the sector.

2.6   This view was reinforced during the subsequent consultation with key staff stakeholders across the University examining issues raised by students. These meetings were essentially formative, helping the review panel to understand the issues from a service delivery perspective and to seek staff suggestions on existing good practice and possible areas for enhancement. In each case staff recognised the themes identified by students and welcomed the opportunity afforded by the review to engage with the issues.

2.7   The initial findings of the consultation sessions were presented to the April 2018 meeting of Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC). It was noted that feedback from the consultation provided insight into what was currently working and issues of concern particularly from a mature student perspective. However, concern was noted at the lack of responses from younger parents and carers. Therefore, in order to ensure that these particular cohorts had sufficient opportunity to contribute to the review SQAC agreed to extend the consultation period over the summer to allow a survey of student carers to be conducted. To this end, it was agreed that the review panel would submit its final report to SQAC at the first meeting of the 2018-19 academic session.

2.8   A survey was conducted between Tuesday 24 July and Tuesday 7 August 2018 seeking to better understand the needs of student carers at the University. The question set was devised by **Carol Hayward**, Student Carers' Representative Edinburgh University Students' Association, and approved (with minor amendments) by the University Student Surveys Ethics Committee. The survey was limited to students who had self-identified as a carers on Euclid during 2017-18 and had agreed to be contacted for further information about their support needs. Of the cohort of 298 self-declared student carers, 51 responses were received which represented a 17% response rate.

2.9   The review panel met for the final time in September 2018 to agree on the key findings and recommendations of the review.

2.10   The final report and recommendations were discussed and approved at SQAC at the meeting held on 20 September 2018.

3. Findings

3.1 Data

3.1.1 Statistics

The review panel noted that out of the total student population at the University of Edinburgh, 45% are classed as 'mature' (i.e. 21 or over at the point of entry). This compares with 59% of the total United Kingdom HE student population and 63% of the HE population in Scotland.

Of the mature students at the University, 54% are postgraduate taught students, 29% postgraduate research and 17% undergraduate. Of the mature students at the University, 60% are in full-time study, 21% part-time and 19% online distance learning.

Of the total University student population 7% declared dependents at the point of entry. Of these students with declared dependents 58% are postgraduate taught students, 22% postgraduate research and 20% undergraduate. Of the total student population with declared dependents, 38% are online distance learning students.

The figures for Edinburgh are in line with peer institutions in the Russell Group[5].

3.1.2 Characteristics

The review panel noted research by the National Union of Students (NUS)[6] highlighting the diversity of mature students, student parents and student carers in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, previous qualifications, work experience, personal and financial circumstances, family and caring responsibilities, and motivations for study. Some general characteristics were noted:

- The majority of student parents and student carers are also mature students.

- Student parents and student carers are more likely to be women, and due to their caring responsibilities, are more likely to be part-time, attending a local institution and studying for a vocational qualification.

- The majority of part-time students at UK universities are mature students. Part-time study appeals to some mature students because it enables them to balance between academic study, financial commitments and other responsibilities such as paid employment and/or family and caring responsibilities.

- There are more female than male mature students. This reflects historic trends of participation in HE as well as the higher qualification requirements for professions such as teaching, nursing and social work that remain attractive for some women who are looking to change career or return to work following a career break.

- Mature students are more likely to have disabilities. This reflects the fact that students with disabilities tend to face greater barriers to accessing HE and are therefore more likely to go to university as mature students if they participate in HE.

- Mature students are more likely to be from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. Once again reflecting the fact that BME students tend to face greater barriers to accessing HE and are therefore more likely to go to university as mature students if they participate in HE.

- Mature students are more likely to be from more disadvantaged backgrounds. Among students whose backgrounds are known, mature students are less likely to be employed in professional and managerial occupations and more likely be employed in intermediate, semi-routine and routine occupations, compared to the parents of their younger peers.

- Mature students are less likely to complete their courses. Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) performance indicators show that mature students are consistently twice as likely as young students to withdraw between the first and second year of study.

- Mature students may be less likely to obtain 'good' degrees. Variable attainment levels may reflect the diverse qualifications and backgrounds of mature students and the challenges that they may experience along the way. In this context 'distance travelled' may be considered to be a fairer way of measuring outcomes than absolute attainment. However, degree attainment could also be a measure of the success of institutional retention and academic support strategies.

3.1.3   Data Collection

The review panel noted that data on student parents and carers is limited.

Institutions have not been required to collect data on students with caring responsibilities so there is no exact information on how many student parents or carers there are across the UK HE sector. However, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) is making a move to address this deficit by collecting data on carer applicants via an additional tick box on application forms for carers to self-identify.

The University collects data at the point of entry on dependents based on a 'Yes' or 'No' response. However this data does not include students who are caring for someone other than a child. During the 2017-18 academic session the University invited student carers to self-declare via Euclid with the proviso that they may be contacted. However, there is currently no regular, systematic collection of data on student parents or carers and the data that is collected remains largely unused.

The review panel was in agreement that the University needs a more systematic approach to the collection of data on student parents and carers. This will provide the University with a baseline understanding of these student cohorts. This data should be collected prior to or at the point of entry and the new UCAS data could be utilised as part of this process. However, a student may become a carer (or cease to be a carer) at any time during their studies and so there should also be regular, systematic opportunities for students to self-declare (or change their caring status) during their time at the University.

The review panel **recommends** that the **Student Systems** develop and implement a systematic collection of data on student parents and student carers.

3.2 Policy

The review panel noted that mature students and student parents and carers would like the University to be flexible, sensitive, and equitable in its approach to study and support. Students would like support to be proactive rather than predicated on circumstances reaching a crisis point. Student parents and carers are particularly concerned that caring responsibilities should not, in themselves, prevent them from succeeding at University.

The review panel **recommends** that the **Director of Student Wellbeing** and **Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee** develop and implement a Student Parent and Student Carer Policy setting clear expectations for when the institution and the individual need to take action.

3.3 Transition and Support

3.3.1 Disclosure

The review panel noted that where, when, and how to disclose caring responsibilities is a key concern for student parents and carers as often disclosure will only happen after there has been an impact on studies.

Students would like a system to be in place to enable parents and carers to disclose their caring responsibilities early, easily and efficiently. The system should make clear to students what information will be shared, and with whom. It should also ensure that disclosure is linked to support systems, so that students who declare that they have caring responsibilities have access to the support they need. Support should be systematic and should ensure that all student parents and carers have equal experiences of support, rather than leaving it up to the understanding of individual members of staff. All staff who deal with students on a regular basis should have an understanding of how institutional policies apply to student parents and carers. Students suggested that specialised staff could liaise students after disclosure to help determine which adjustments may be appropriate to their needs and to help them better manage their study and caring responsibilities. Students also noted that it would be important to explain the benefits of disclosure for the individual student, and the wider student community, in order to maximise disclosures.

The review panel **recommends** that the **Director of Student Wellbeing** develop and implement a systematic and sensitive disclosure process for student parents and carers with follow-up assessment of needs and appropriate support, advice and guidance. This system must be underpinned by a programme of training for academic and professional service staff supporting it, with particular in-depth training for those assessing the needs and recommending support mechanisms.

3.3.2 Adjustments

The review panel noted several examples of student parents and carers denied support.

Students responding to the consultation cited examples of being denied support during examinations. Examples noted included students not being allowed to sit near the door to access the toilets (or another room) in order to express milk and pregnant students not being allowed to stand up to ease discomfort or to take an exam in a comfortable chair in an alternative quieter exam room. The review panel noted that students seeking such adjustments before exams are often referred to the Student

Disability Service but fail to get the support they need as their situation does not fall into a category of disability. Students also noted other examples that should not be considered 'disabled' such as trans students who have had surgery and have additional support needs. The review panel was in agreement that the University needs a more sympathetic and systematic approach to these types of support needs. A system which recognises pre-existing or ongoing additional support needs (such as the additional burdens of students with caring responsibilities) with a defined and limited set of adjustments may help students avoid reaching a crisis point in their studies. Such a system may also help to reduce the bureaucratic burden of repeat Special Circumstances (SC) applications with all the associated time-consuming and stressful evidence requirements that entails.

The review panel noted that currently it is the individual student's responsibility to inform the University (via their Personal Tutor or Student Support Team) of any issues that may impact upon their studies. Student parents or carers can then submit a SC request if they have an exceptional or non-routine caring responsibility that has affected their ability to complete an assessment. This application process places the onus on the student to include evidence each time in support of their request, which is then referred to by the Boards of Examiners when making decisions. Student parents or carers may need to submit regular SC requests during their time at University. Students noted that this administrative process can place additional stress on parents and carers already coping with additional duties and pressures. Students suggested that a limited range of adjustments that are consistent with, but not the same as, those for disabled students could be put in place for students with caring responsibilities as part of a disclosure and assessment process. It was noted that Moray House School of Education currently has such a system of adjustments in place for its students.

The review panel **recommends** that **Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee** and the **Director of Student Wellbeing** consider developing a system of adjustments (covering issues such as extensions and examination arrangements) that are consistent with, but not the same as, those for disabled students.

3.3.3 Induction

The review panel noted that mature students and student parents and carers responding to the consultation felt that they had experienced little by way of induction and what had been provided was not particularly relevant to their needs. The transition into HE can be challenging for mature students and student parents and carers and it is important that the induction process responds to their specific needs. Students suggested that dedicated open days and specific online guidance (including appropriate quotes/videos/FAQs) would be very helpful.

The review panel **recommends** that **Student Recruitment and Admissions** conduct a consultation with mature students and student parents and carers and tailor induction provision according to the findings.

The review panel noted that Moving On was cited as an excellent induction to undergraduate life for local students with Widening Participation (WP) backgrounds. The short orientation course takes place in the week prior to Welcome Week and provides an introduction to the University campus and libraries and the study skills that will be required during the students' first weeks on their chosen degree programme.

The review panel **commends** the **Centre for Open Learning** (and partner areas across the University) on the Moving On short course for local students with Widening Participation backgrounds.

3.3.4   Information

The review panel noted that mature students and student parents and carers are often juggling study with home life, work and dependents. In this context accurate, clear and timely provision of information is vital so that practical arrangements can be planned.

The review panel noted that much of the information that mature students and student parents and carers need is available, but concealed behind the University corporate and somewhat intimidating webpage style. Information for mature students is delivered via the central Mature Students webpages. Information on support for student parents and carers is delivered via a number sources: Equality and Diversity - webpage which includes information on family friendly support for students during their study time with the University; Human Resources - Health and Wellbeing (related policies and guidance); Scholarships and Student Funding - Students with Children (details on government funding and University Bursaries); Edinburgh Global - Students with Dependents (information for international students including A Guide to Life in Edinburgh for Dependents); Childcare information for postgraduate students - Childcare; and the Students' Association website provides further information for students with children or caring responsibilities.

Students responding to the consultation regard this information as fragmented and poorly signposted.

The review panel **recommends** that the **Director of Student Wellbeing and Student Systems** develop central, user-friendly webpage portals for mature students, student parents, and student carers. These pages must provide clear and supportive information on support, representation and facilities including application details and profiles, quotes, videos or case studies, and wider local community information (e.g. childcare, finance etc.).

The review panel noted that information for international Students with Dependents and specific information for those bringing children is provided via the University website. There is also a Facebook networking group and an International Women's Club which is mainly for international female partners of University students (usually international PG level students) or new employees (many of whom have children). Edinburgh Global also produce an International Arrival Guide with practical guidance for international students and A Guide to Life in Edinburgh for Dependents.

The review panel commends Edinburgh Global on the quality, volume and effectiveness of its information and guidance for International Students.

The panel noted that changes to Edinburgh Global which are being considered as part of the Service Excellence Programme may impact on the level of support provided to international mature students and student parents and carers.

The review panel **recommends** that the **Service Excellence Programme** and any other reviews that impact on Student Support ensure that the continuation of welfare support for international students is considered as part of any organisational changes to Edinburgh Global.

3.3.5 Careers Guidance

The review panel noted that mature students responding to the consultation felt that the Careers Service is geared to the needs of younger students looking for their first job as opposed to more mature students seeking advice on how to use their degree to advance in their current profession or to make a mid-career change.

The Careers Service reported that it encourages students to use relevant professional bodies and existing training support networks for specialist information and advice where these are well established (e.g. Royal Colleges, medical specialty training bodies, National Health Service career planning, Scottish Medical Training, specialty and associate specialist tutors). The Careers Service also offers appointments with career consultants to support mid-career students in identifying strengths, preferences, values and examine and evaluate options whatever their circumstances.

The Assistant Director of the Careers Service cited several examples of working with mature students (including some WP backgrounds) including: working with a mother of three in final year with a previous career in retail management and looking to build confidence; working with a father of two in third year with previous successful media business and looking at options for further study, returning to business or taking a new direction; and working with a single mother of two and carer for own mother who had previous career in retail management and seeking to gain experience to compete in graduate labour market. The Assistant Director of the Careers Service also noted an example of a successful career-changer who moved from a career at Reuters into law. After successfully securing a new position they contacted the Assistant Director to express their gratitude: "*Thanks so much for your help - all the techniques and tips you gave to me really helped. If you or the University ever need anyone to sing the praises of the Careers Service and you in particular please let me know - I'd be very glad to help*".

The review panel **commends** the **Careers Service** on the advice, guidance and support for mature students and students with caring responsibilities. The review panel encourages the Carers Service to ensure that the specific needs of mature students considering a career change are included in its support provision, including the positive impact of Alumni Mentors who have experience of this type of career transition.

3.4 Learning and Teaching

3.4.1 Flexibility

The review panel noted that mature students and student parents and carers tend to study under significantly different contexts compared to their more traditional entry 18-19 year old peers. The constraints faced by these students whilst combining academic demands with career or caring responsibilities can result in a greater need for a more flexible approach to study. Students responding to the consultation noted that part-time and other flexible study options would help them balance work and caring responsibilities with their academic commitments. Students noted that there are relatively little undergraduate part-time study options or opportunities at the University.

The review panel **recommends** that **Senate Learning and Teaching Committee** explore the options for growing undergraduate part-time provision to provide more flexible study options for mature students and student parents and carers. This would also benefit many other groups of students, including those from WP backgrounds.

3.4.2 Online Lecture Recording

The review panel noted that mature students and student parents and carers value the flexibility provided by online lecture recordings. Students responding to the consultation suggested that more widespread use of lecture recording would provide an additional element of support if and when work or caring commitments prevented attendance (or in the case of international students, to help when language was a barrier).

The review panel **recommends** that **Senate Learning and Teaching Committee** embed lecture recording fully across all academic areas, with an opt-out policy to maximise the availability of lectures to mature students and student parents and carers. This would also benefit many other groups of students, including those from WP backgrounds and international students.

3.4.3 Timetabling

The review panel noted that mature students participating in the review felt that classes, lectures or extra-curricular events are primarily organised and orientated to the needs of 18-19 year olds living on or near campus. Students with work or caring responsibilities find early (due to the school run) or late (due to the school run or work commitments) or Friday afternoon (due to the Edinburgh school half day) compulsory/core course starts problematic. Students also noted that advanced and prompt issuing of timetabling information is vital for those with childcare responsibilities or work commitments.

The review panel noted that Timetabling and Examination Services work with schools to ensure that all core curriculum requirements are accommodated within the constraints of wide curriculum choice and the University's teaching estate. The Head of Timetabling and Examination Services reported that the timetabling team has complex modelling software and expertise to support schools to ensure the experience of all their students is as equitable as possible. The review panel encourages Schools to proactively engage with the timetabling team to identify optimum timetabling solutions.

The Head of Timetabling and Examination Services also reported that the move to personalised timetables via Office 365 enabled advanced and prompt issuing of timetabling information. The new system is not completely comprehensive (some areas of the College of Science and Engineering and the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine have yet to make the switch) however where the facility is available students are able to receive swift notification of any timetable changes. The review panel encourages Schools, where appropriate, to engage with the timetabling team and utilize the new Office 365 personalised timetable system.

3.4.4 Examinations

The review panel noted that student parents struggle with exams on Saturdays due to lack of regular weekday childcare provision. The Head of Timetabling and

Examination Services confirmed that weekend exams are being used only as a last resort in response to the constraints on space due to the current phase of estate development and therefore this is not a permanent arrangement.

3.4.5 Retention and Outcomes

The review panel noted that research[7] indicates that mature students and student parents and carers are less likely to achieve good honours degrees and are also less likely to complete their degree courses than younger students. Whilst it may be reasonable to assume that this reflects the cumulative array of challenges that these students may face (particularly the struggle to balance study with other commitments), there may also be scope for the University to reflect on and enhance the way it supports mature students and student parents and carers.

The review panel was in agreement that the University needed to implement systematic monitoring of retention and degree outcome data by age and caring responsibility. It was noted that it would be important to understand this data in terms of the 'distance travelled' by these students (for example, for some students completing the course is the major achievement, while others may not be satisfied without a 'good degree'). This type of analysis would also provide a greater understanding of the 'value added' by the University and the extent to which student needs have been supported by the University. The data could be monitored at an institutional level, weighted by qualifications on entry, to determine if the differential is actually evidence of systematic disadvantage or whether pre-existing disadvantage is exacerbated or mitigated whilst at Edinburgh. It would also be important to monitor the reasons why mature students and student parents and carers decide to withdraw.

The review panel **recommends** that **Senate Quality Assurance Committee** implement systematic monitoring of retention and degree outcome data by age and caring responsibility and, if appropriate, develop interventions where there are clear and consistent patterns of divergence between 'traditional' students and mature students, student parents, student carers.

3.5 Children

The review panel noted that students with children cited 'child-friendly attitudes' as fundamental to their student experience.

3.5.1 Child Friendly Campus

The review panel noted a general feeling amongst students and staff consulted during the review that the University is not a particularly child friendly place to study or work. In particular, students and staff noted that there are very few child friendly spaces, baby changing or bottle-feeding facilities across the University estate.

In particular, students with children identified the Policy for Child Access to the Main Library as an unwelcoming and inequitable barrier. Students raised questions as to why an additional policy for children is required as opposed to simply requiring students with children to adhere to the same standard of non-disruptive behaviour as all other library users.

The Director of Library and University Collections noted that the Library had previously identified the policy as in need of revision and is currently undertaking a review. The policy was devised with a mind to the underlying Health and Safety issues related to public access of library facilities (which include hazards such as a large array of electronic equipment, large and movable book stacks, and open plan stairwells) and minimising risk (particularly in regard to the additional duty of care responsibilities for children on campus). The additional requirement for Personal Escape and Evacuation Plan (PEEP) was also regarded as a barrier to open access. It was noted that the numbers of student parent and carer users are relatively small and that the wider student community continued to place a high value on the quiet and studious environment provided by the Library. The Library is currently benchmarking with other institutions (such as Glasgow and Stirling) to understand how they approach this issue.

The Director of Library and University Collections also noted that the Library service is currently restricted by the lack of space in the Main Library building. The impending Main Library development project (which may include an extension of space at ground level) would provide an opportunity to take a more strategic and comprehensive approach to the issue. The Library is liaising with the Students' Association to understand how facilities in the Library could be improved for students with caring responsibilities. It was noted that the Library has struggled to find ways to engage and consult with student parents and carers particularly due to the lack of data in relation to these student cohorts. However, it was noted that Library had recently given students access to a new breastmilk fridge.

The review panel **commends** the **Main Library** for providing students with access to a breastmilk fridge and encourages similar facilities to be made available to students in each library across the University estate.

The panel noted that the Library would welcome a definitive statement from the University specifically in regard to child access requirements but also more generally in relation to child friendly campus aspirations. The review panel noted a lack of University information or guidance on how service areas within the institution should approach these matters.

3.5.2 Crèche Facilities

The review panel noted that students with caring responsibilities reported that they tend to have a lot of last minute or short-period childcare requirements (usually just a couple of hours) which could be accommodated by the provision of crèche facilities. However, the University has no crèche facilities and provision across Edinburgh is extremely limited with only a hand full of facilities mainly based in Schools and Sports Centres.

Students cited the public crèche at the Scottish Parliament as an example of good practice. The crèche is considered to be an important part of creating an open and accessible Parliament. The crèche is free to the public and provides care for children aged 6 weeks to 5 years. It is open from 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday and can be used for up to 4 hours at a time and can be pre-booked or used on a drop-in basis (subject to availability). A Child Entry Form must be fully completed prior to a child

being admitted to ensure that staff have all the relevant information to enable children to be cared for appropriately. Parents/carers must sign their child into the crèche to provide a signature for comparison when the child is being collected at the end of the session. Parents/carers are required to be contactable while their child is in attendance at the crèche and must collect their child at an allotted time. The crèche is run for the Parliament by Tinies UK Ltd. The cost of the Crèche is £4 per/hour or part hour but visitors to the Parliament may use the Crèche free of charge.

Students suggested that the University explore the viability of crèche provision with consideration given to the following: a subsidised scheme for students; facilities open to the broader community if demand was insufficient to cross-subsidise the student and staff prices; co-locating facilities with a business or social enterprise or a nursery (in the Central Area, preferably) or as a stand-alone model.

3.5.3   Nursery Provision

The review panel noted that students with caring responsibilities regard the University's nursery provision as expensive and geared to the needs of full-time users with little or no flexibility when timetables change or in relation to the needs of students.

Students with children reported facing a number of difficulties accessing nursery provision which was suitable for their needs. Student parents noted that they frequently use family or friends for childcare in order to attend University and had been late for, or had to miss, lectures or classes because of problems with childcare or child sickness. The review panel noted that the national shortage of childcare places, high costs, and the flexibility required by most student parents present significant challenges to their participation at University.

The University's nursery provision is centred on the Arcadia Nursery based at two locations across the estate. The review panel was impressed by the state of the art facility at King's Buildings which welcomes children from the surrounding neighbourhood as well as staff and students. A new Nursery at the Easter Bush Campus opened in August 2018 and will enable the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies (RDSVS) and the Roslin Institute to meet the childcare elements of their Gold Athena SWAN action plan.

The review panel noted that the location of the nursery at the King's Building had been driven by the availability of a sufficiently large plot of land alongside the need to relocate the two existing University nurseries from inadequate accommodations. At Easter Bush the nursery development has been driven by a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and the Roslin Institute to help relocate the Forest Friends Nursery from the BBSRC site at Roslin together with strong local backing from RDSVS. No benchmarking of provision in peer institutions had been undertaken and nor had students or staff been consulted to determine needs or demand (which had been largely based on current and historical trends). Accommodation, Catering and Events have no plans to develop nursery provision at the Central Area or currently at the Little France campus.

The review panel noted that the facilities are fully owned by the University and are therefore expensive to maintain. Director of Accommodation, Catering and Events reported that the nursery's childcare charges are in line with other local private providers and that, from a service provider perspective, the irregular hours (often subject to last minute changes) required by students are difficult to accommodate. To ensure facilities are run efficiently, without drawing on resources that could be used on other aspects of the student experience, most of the Nursery's users are able to commit to regular and numerous hours and tend to be predominantly drawn from the local neighbourhood. The Director noted that childcare users tend to want to use provision close to where they live and not necessarily where they work or study.

The review panel noted that students consulted during the review cited the University of Glasgow as an example of good practice. The nursery at the University of Glasgow is intended for matriculated students and staff members. Because of the competition for places a Childcare Committee (made up of 5 members: a Senate representative (Chair), a representative from Human Resources, an early years researcher, a union nominee, and the sitting Vice President, Student Support) operates a priority rating system for all applications in order to facilitate placements. Priority is given to applicants whose circumstances make it extremely difficult for them to return to or take up work or study at the University without a nursery place for their child. The specific criteria used in the priority rating system include: single parenthood; both parents being staff and / or students at the University; having a sibling already in place at the Nursery; lack of a support network; applicants returning to work or study after a period of leave (e.g. paternity, maternity, adoptive leave etc.). Fee subsidies can be applied for by students and staff members of the University, and are relative to total family income. The nursery is run by a professional childcare organisation (Childcare Scotland Ltd) on behalf of the University.

Students also cited the University of St Andrews' nursery provision (managed by Roseangle House Nursery on behalf of the University) which aims to provide childcare places to all staff and students but will prioritise places to parents who fall into the following criteria: parents or children with a disability; lone parents; student parents. Thereafter, all other applicants (including external applicants) are offered places when available but students and staff receive 10% discount off fees. The review panel noted that the Universities of Aberdeen and Dundee also have similar nursery provision, primarily for students and staff, with priority criteria and student and staff discounts.

3.5.4 Childcare Funding

The review panel noted student uncertainty and stress caused by childcare funding arrangements.

Students responding to the consultation perceive the childcare funding process as overly bureaucratic, with numerous forms and evidence required before decisions are made. Students must already have a place and be self-funding before they can apply for financial help with costs. At the start of the academic year students must have received their initial Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) payment before they can apply for further support from the childcare fund and/or the lone parent childcare grant. Even if their SAAS funding is prompt, the childcare fund applications

can take up to 15 working days to process which can result in a delay between taking up a childcare place and receiving the funding to maintain it. This can be particularly stressful if they do not get the funding (and it is by no means guaranteed) and cannot afford to keep it. Furthermore, students in receipt of housing benefit face uncertainty as this fluctuates in proportion to the amount of student funding they receive. Keeping up to date with this can be difficult as it usually falls at exam time. If students apply for discretionary funding over the summer whilst they are not getting student funding, this can also have an impact on housing benefit.

The review panel noted that fully funded childcare bursaries had recently been discontinued.

3.5.5   The review panel **recommends** that the **Vice-Principal People and Culture** and **Director of Student Wellbeing** conduct a strategic review of childcare provision, from the provision of child friendly spaces and crèche facilities to nurseries and childcare bursaries. The review must include benchmarking with peer institutions and consultation with students and staff in order to understand fully the needs of students and staff and to provide an evidence base for strategic decision making regarding the allocation of resources.

3.6   **Social**

The review panel noted that some students felt that there is a lack of a lack of events or fora for mature students and student parents and carers to meet and socialise with students with similar needs or backgrounds.

The review panel noted that the students who responded to the consultation were enjoying the opportunity to study and had not made the decision to attend University primarily for the social life. However, some students noted a lack of opportunities to meet and socialise with students with similar needs or backgrounds. Mature students emphasised that their social needs tended to be different from those of their younger or peers without caring responsibilities and that this did not seem to be catered for at the University. It was noted that students, particularly international students, tend to rely on informal peer support networks but that the opportunity to pair up with more experienced peers at the University would help with both the induction process and socialisation.

Students would like more dedicated spaces (either physical or virtual) where they can casually meet other students with a similar backgrounds and better signposting or information on current activities and spaces available which can be booked or utilised. Students would like opportunities for social engagement which are rooted in local accommodation or driven by academic activities as these were perceived by students as more likely to be embraced and flourish than University wide networks or associations with nebulous ambitions. Student parents also suggested that University organised playgroups would be a great way for student parents to meet and support each other.

The review panel **recommends** that the **Director of Student Wellbeing** explore the need to support the development of online or in-person social networks for mature students and student parents and carers, recognising the lack of time they have to establish these on their own.

3.7 Student Carers

The review panel noted the particular challenges faced by student carers as identified by the student carer survey, the consultation with the Student Carer Representative and as highlighted in research by the Carers Trust. The review panel also noted the work being done to improve support for care-experienced students (students who have spent time in local authority care) at the University, as well as the proposal that the Implementation Group being established to oversee support for care-experienced students should also include estranged students and student carers.

The review panel **recommends** that oversight of support for student carers should be integrated into the remit of the Implementation Group overseeing support for care-experienced and estranged students, chaired by the **Director of Student Wellbeing**.

The review panel noted that students with caring responsibilities for a disabled adult or child reported that <u>Changing Places</u> facilities enabled them to access the University if they needed to with the disabled adult or child they were caring for. The Disability Access and Equality Manager reported that the University does currently offer several changing places facilities, which have been fitted into existing spaces wherever this has been possible. These provide a beneficial facility for some people but may not be useable by everyone. There is currently no legal requirement in relation to the provision of changing places, however for new developments or significant refurbishments, the provision of changing places facilities is considered in line with current best practice guidance and the University's policies to ensure an accessible environment.

The review panel **recommends** that the **University Disability Access and Equality Manager** consider the appropriate provision of Changing Places facilities across the estate.

4. Conclusion

The review panel noted that the University is seeking to expand its intake beyond the 'traditional' student profile as part of the new Widening Participation Strategy. The review panel was in agreement that the University must recognise the range of support needs of these new student cohorts, including mature students and student parents and carers. In some aspects, these support needs may diverge from the provision of support that the University has traditionally been geared towards. Whilst this may necessitate an institutional conversation as to the University's strategic approach, the review panel was in agreement that the University has a duty of care to support all of its students and provide them with an equal opportunity to succeed at their studies.

List of Commendations

Paragraph Reference	Commendations
3.3.3	The review panel **commends** the **Centre for Open Learning** (and partner areas across the University) on the Moving On short course for local students with Widening Participation backgrounds.
3.3.4	The review panel **commends Edinburgh Global** on the quality, volume and effectiveness of its information and guidance for International Students.
3.3.5	The review panel **commends** the **Careers Service** on the advice, guidance and support for mature students and students with caring responsibilities. The review panel encourages the Carers Service to ensure that the specific needs of mature students considering a career change are included in its support provision, including the positive impact of Alumni Mentors who have experience of this type of career transition.
3.5.1	The review panel **commends** the **Main Library** for providing students with access to a breastmilk fridge and encourages similar facilities to be made available to students in each library across the University estate.

List of Recommendations

Paragraph Reference	Recommendation	Responsibility
3.1.3	The review panel **recommends** that the **Student Systems** develop and implement a systematic collection of data on student parents and student carers.	Student Systems
3.2	The review panel **recommends** that the **Director of Student Wellbeing** and **Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee** develop and implement a Student Parent and Student Carer Policy setting clear expectations for when the institution and the individual need to take action.	Director of Student Wellbeing and Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee
3.3.1	The review panel **recommends** that the **Director of Student Wellbeing** develop and implement a systematic and sensitive disclosure process for student parents and carers with follow-up assessment of needs and appropriate support, advice and guidance. This system must be underpinned by a programme of training for academic and professional service staff supporting it, with particular in-depth training for those assessing the needs and recommending support mechanisms.	Director of Student Wellbeing
3.3.2	The review panel **recommends** that **Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee** and the **Director of Student Wellbeing** consider developing a system of adjustments (covering issues such as extensions and	Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee and the

	examination arrangements) that are consistent with, but not the same as, those for disabled students.	Director of Student Wellbeing
3.3.3	The review panel **recommends** that **Student Recruitment and Admissions** conduct a consultation with mature students and student parents and carers and tailor induction provision according to the findings.	Student Recruitment and Admissions
3.3.4	The review panel **recommends** that the **Director of Student Wellbeing** and **Student Systems** develop central, user-friendly webpage portals for mature students, student parents, and student carers. These pages must provide clear and supportive information on support, representation and facilities including application details and profiles, quotes, videos or case studies, wider local community information (e.g. childcare, finance etc.).	Director of Student Wellbeing and Student Systems
3.3.4	The review panel **recommends** that the **Service Excellence Programme** and any other reviews that impact on Student Support ensure that the continuation of welfare support for international students is considered as part of any organisational changes to Edinburgh Global.	Service Excellence Programme
3.4.1	The review panel **recommends** that **Senate Learning and Teaching Committee** explore the options for growing undergraduate part-time provision to provide more flexible study options for mature students and student parents and carers. This would benefit many other groups of students, including those from Widening Participation backgrounds.	Senate Learning and Teaching Committee
3.4.2	The review panel **recommends** that **Senate Learning and Teaching Committee** embed lecture recording fully across all academic areas, with an opt-out policy to maximise the availability of lectures to mature students and student parents and carers. This would benefit many other groups of students, including those from Widening Participation backgrounds and international students.	Senate Learning and Teaching Committee
3.4.5	The review panel **recommends** that **Senate Quality Assurance Committee** implement systematic monitoring of retention and degree outcome data by age and caring responsibility and, if appropriate, develop interventions where there are clear and consistent patterns of divergence between 'traditional' students and mature students, student parents, student carers.	Senate Quality Assurance Committee
3.5.5	The review panel **recommends** that the **Vice-Principal People and Culture** and **Director of Student Wellbeing** conduct a strategic review of childcare provision, from the provision of child friendly spaces and crèche facilities to nurseries and childcare bursaries. The review must include benchmarking with peer institutions and consultation with students and staff in order to understand	Vice-Principal People and Culture and Director of Student Wellbeing

	fully the needs of students and staff and to provide an evidence base for strategic decision making regarding the allocation of resources.	
3.6	The review panel **recommends** that the **Director of Student Wellbeing** explore the need to support the development of online or in-person social networks for mature students and student parents and carers, recognising the lack of time they have to establish these on their own.	Director of Student Wellbeing
3.7	The review panel **recommends** that oversight of support for student carers should be integrated into the remit of the Implementation Group overseeing support for care-experienced and estranged students, chaired by the **Director of Student Wellbeing**.	Director of Student Wellbeing
3.7	The review panel **recommends** that the **University Disability Access and Equality Manager** consider the appropriate provision of Changing Places facilities across the estate.	University Disability Access and Equality Manager

Endnotes

[1] National Union of Students (NUS) & MillionPlus, *Never to Late too Learn* (2012); NUS, *Meet the Parents* (2009); NUS, *Learning with Care* (2013).

[2] National Union of Students (NUS) & MillionPlus, Never to Late too Learn (2012); MillionPlus, *Forgotten Learners: building a system that works for mature students* (2018); NUS, *Meet the Parents* (2009); NUS, *Learning with Care* (2013); UK Universities, *The Power of Part Time: Review of Part Time and Mature Higher Education* (2013).

[3] University of Bristol, *A report into mature students' experiences of support at the University of Bristol* (2014), University of Surrey, *Understanding the support needs of mature students* (2011).

[4] National Union of Students (NUS) & MillionPlus, Never to Late too Learn (2012); MillionPlus, *Forgotten Learners: building a system that works for mature students* (2018); NUS, *Meet the Parents* (2009); NUS, *Learning with Care* (2013); UK Universities, *The Power of Part Time: Review of Part Time and Mature Higher Education* (2013).

[5] National Union of Students (NUS) & MillionPlus, Never to Late too Learn (2012).

[6] National Union of Students (NUS) & MillionPlus, *Never to Late too Learn* (2012); NUS, *Meet the Parents* (2009); NUS, *Learning with Care* (2013).

[7] National Union of Students (NUS) & MillionPlus, *Never to Late too Learn* (2012); NUS, *Meet the Parents* (2009); NUS, *Learning with Care* (2013).