Enhancing Student Support

Project Communication Strategy: Phase 1

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1. **Enhancing Student Support Project Aims**

The Enhancing Student Support (ESS) project aims to deliver effective arrangements for students’ academic and pastoral support at the University of Edinburgh. The overriding aim of the project is to ensure that, over the next decade and beyond, students have access to a framework of guidance and support that:

- builds on the best of current practices
- meets contemporary needs, and
- is of a quality and consistency appropriate to a university of high global standing.

1.1 **ESS Communication Strategy Aims**

All students and all staff involved in student support will be aware of the University’s Enhancing Student Support project and their role in delivering it.

This Communication Strategy for Phase 1 of the Enhancing Student Support project will help the ESS Project Team to ensure that information about the project is shared with students and staff to improve their understanding. Sharing information and experiences will strengthen the ESS project and improve student support.

2. **Objectives: Phase 1**

There are six principal strands to the ESS project:

- articulating roles, responsibilities, and remits within a new Personal Tutor system: for Personal Tutor, Personal Tutee, Senior Tutor, Dean of Students and Student Support Officer
- rolling-out peer support ‘families’/buddy systems across the University
- strengthening central student services
- compiling IT tools and other resource materials for advisees and advisors
- planning communication, briefing and training strategies
- and revision of the present *Standards and Guiding Principles for Academic and Pastoral Support*.

The ESS project will be delivered in several phases over the next three years. The key deliverables of the Phase 1 project are set out in the ESS Project Plan.

**Phase 1** - to establish the objectives, deliverables and organisational requirements for successful implementation of the Enhancing Student Support project

**Phase 2** - to evaluate and monitor pilot elements and establish on-going detailed requirements, including procuring and/or developing any required software components for implementation following August 2012

**Phase 3** - to evaluate the project and to encourage the adoption of examples of good practice by other areas of the University
2.1 Communication Strategy Objectives
The Enhancing Student Support Communication Strategy objectives are to:

- Raise the profile and awareness of Enhancing Student Support at the University internally and, where appropriate, externally
- Inform staff and students about the new processes, resources and support
- Promote and support the evaluation and development of the Enhancing Student Support project by encouraging direct input and dialogue with students and staff
- Coordinate the way in which the University communicates with students about the Enhancing Student Support project and therefore reduce the risk of non-strategic "over-communication" from disparate elements of the University.

In Phase 1 of the ESS project communication will mainly focus on:

- The creation of the project
- Benchmarking with other institutions
- The new Personal Tutor system
- Gaining input to developing IT tools
- Developing resource materials for students and staff

3. Audiences
The ESS project has a number of audiences and stakeholders. Consistent use of the same messages about the ESS project can lead to greater clarity and understanding, although the timing, nature and language of some messages will need to be targeted to specific audiences. This will be reflected in the ESS Communications Strategy's timetable of activity and timelines: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Communication+Timetable+of+activity

The audiences and stakeholders are:

- Students
  - New undergraduate students
  - Continuing undergraduate students
  - New and continuing postgraduate students
  - Students with particular needs, including:
    - Distance education, students on placements/abroad, international students
    - Student representatives
    - Students involved in peer support schemes
  - Potential students
- Staff with key roles
  - Personal Tutor (PT)
  - Senior Tutor (ST)
  - Dean of Students
  - Directors of Teaching
  - Teaching staff
  - Student Support Team including Student Support Officer (SSO)
  - School admin staff with student support roles
  - Staff in central student services, including EUSA
Other staff
- External service providers
- Parents, schools, the public
- The media and political stakeholders

4. **Scope of the Enhancing Student Support Project**
The ESS project will last for at least three years and communication will focus on different audiences, different messages and different strands at different times. Therefore, the project will take a matrix approach to communication. This will look at:

- The project strand
- What the message is
- Who the message is for
- Who will communicate the message
- How the message will be communicated
- Timing and frequency of communications

5. **Key Messages**
The key over-arching message for the Enhancing Student Support project is:

The University of Edinburgh is committed to providing all of its students with outstanding academic and pastoral guidance and high quality student support.

At a corporate, College and School level, the University wants students to understand that it cares deeply about the requirements of students and wants them to participate fully in a two-way dialogue to improve every aspect of the student experience - with personal tutors as a significant partner in this dialogue.

Over its life-span, the Enhancing Student Support project will raise awareness of the enhancements to student guidance and support; establish expectations and minimum standards for student support across the University; and identify and spread good practice to improve the consistency and quality of the holistic student experience.

5.1 **Enhancing Student Support Project Campaigns**
The Enhancing Student Support project sits within the wider context of support for the students at the University. Within this, there will be scope for specific campaigns that highlight particular aspects of the ESS project and/or activities to enhance the student experience, for example, the launch of the Personal Tutoring System, or development of MyEdGE, a web portfolio which focuses on students' graduate attributes.

6. **Key Participants**
Enhancing Student Support is a University-wide project which is being delivered by:

- Schools
- Students
- EUSA
The ESS Project Team and SSIG have a role in ensuring that there is good, clear communication for all aspects of the project. Some people have roles in delivering key messages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strand</th>
<th>Lead responsibility</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Colleges/University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Tutor system</td>
<td>Dai Hounsell, Deans of Students</td>
<td>Senior Tutors, SSOs and equivalents</td>
<td>Class reps?</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Deans of Students, Deans of Learning and Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer support</td>
<td>Sarah Purves, EUSA Vice President, Academic Affairs</td>
<td>Senior Tutors</td>
<td>Students involved in peer support schemes</td>
<td>EUSA</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening central student services</td>
<td>Sue Rigby</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Heads of Services</td>
<td>Assistant Principal leading the review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT tools</td>
<td>Ian Pirie</td>
<td>Teaching Organisations</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>SACS, IS</td>
<td>IT for ESS Project Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource materials, briefing and training</td>
<td>Jon Turner</td>
<td>Senior Tutors</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>IAD, working with other key services</td>
<td>Deans of Students, Deans of Learning and Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Ian Pirie, Sara Welham</td>
<td>Senior Tutors</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>EUSA</td>
<td>Project Team/SSIG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic and Pastoral Support Standards and Guiding Principles</td>
<td>Dai Hounsell</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Vice Principal Academic Enhancement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Enhancing Student Support Project Measures of Success

7.1 Communication Strategy Outputs

In the communication strand for Phase 1 of the ESS project, we aim to produce:

- A Communication Strategy for Phase 1
- Personal Tutoring Statements for each School
• Resource materials about the project, e.g. *Roles and Responsibilities: Personal Tutor System*, material available via the IAD website, e.g. student FAQs, staff FAQs
• Key networks for communication, e.g. contacts in Schools, Services and Colleges, Senior Tutor network, Student Support Team network
• A project wiki
• A benchmarking event
• Information events in Schools and Colleges
• Powerpoint presentations that provide general information about ESS and the Personal Tutor system and on the IT tools which Schools can use for local delivery
• Workshops and briefing events, e.g. “Personal Tutor IT Tools: Train the trainer”, “Personal Tutors: running lively and useful group meetings”
• Monthly e-updates
• Bulk emails and MyEd announcements when appropriate
• Publicity materials
• video interviews for broadcast online explaining the new initiative
• articles in appropriate locations of the website
• A final report on Phase 1

### 7.2 Evaluation and Review
SSIG will evaluate and review the effectiveness of the Communication Strategy and use this information to develop the Enhancing Student Support project and the Communication Strategy for Phase 2. SSIG will wish to establish that the Strategy has delivered its stated aims; that information has been timely and helpful; that stakeholders have been able to access information; and that any gaps have been identified and plans made to remedy them for future phases. Measures of the effectiveness will be:

• The number of measures of success achieved
• Number of hits on the wiki, attendees at events, presentations made
• Input from staff and students about whether the ESS communications have been timely, effective and have met their needs (via surveys, focus groups, on-line comments and suggestions, ad hoc feedback, etc)

### 8. Communication Plan
As the Enhancing Student Support project has multiple strands and communication needs to come from multiple sources, we will take a matrix approach to try to facilitate effective, efficient and coordinated communication. **Who authorises** messages will depend on the message level:

• University-wide messages, authorised by the ESS Project Team
• University-wide **core-plus** messages, which Schools expand to provide local context. The University-wide core of the message is authorised by the ESS Project Team.
• College messages, authorised by the relevant Dean
• School messages, authorised by the School Senior Tutor
• Messages from particular services, including EUSA, which are authorised by the Head of Service
When approving messages, those responsible will bear in mind **timing** factors, which will be charted by the ESS Project Team. A timetable of activity and a timeline for key messages is maintained on the ESS project wiki:

https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Communication+Timetable+of+activity

Those authorising messages will ensure that the appropriate **communication channels** are used, e.g. CAM for all-staff emails, Academic Registry for all-student emails, Schools for local internal messages. They will also consider **who should communicate** the message.

The use of the **core-plus** method, where a core message is added to by a local school or service, is to ensure consistency of key messages, while also enabling local messages to be included. Senior Tutors have a responsibility for ensuring that the core messages are delivered locally where this approach is used.

A **record** of key communications will be kept by the ESS Project Team. Colleges and Schools will send copies of key messages to the ESS Project Team. Copies of university-wide emails to staff and students, and the regular Updates, will be kept on the project wiki.

A variety of **methods** and media will be used to deliver the messages, depending on what is considered to be most effective for the target audience and the message itself:

- Documents and reports
- Templates for Schools to use
- Training and resource materials
- Emails
- Website and wiki
- Updates
- Articles
- Posters, flyers, bookmarks
- Events – workshops, seminars, meetings, presentations
- Network lunches
- Video interviews

### 9. Budget

There is a small budget for University-wide communications, which is managed by Academic Registry. Schools and Colleges may also wish to earmark funds for communication from within existing resources and their budgets, which were increased as part of the ESS project.

### 10. Risk Management

Risks to effective communication and the means of mitigating them are:

- The message gets distorted – use clear and consistent language, “core-plus” messages and templates
- We target the wrong groups – check networks with Schools, Colleges, Services and EUSA
- We bombard people with communications – communicators will check the communication plan timelines
- We don’t get effective feedback from users – use networks for input and insight
11. Project Team Contact Details

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**School Senior Tutors:** There is a list of Senior Tutors on the ESS project wiki:  
[https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Senior+Tutor+Network](https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Senior+Tutor+Network)

12. Acknowledgements

In preparing this Communication Strategy, in addition to considering previous University of Edinburgh communication plans the ESS Project Team benchmarked against project strategies and approaches used in other University contexts in Aberdeen, Adelaide, Cornell and Oxford.


www.adelaide.edu.au/hr/strategic/comms_strategy.doc

http://stars.sas.cornell.edu/planning/communication2005.php

www.ox.ac.uk/public_affairs/getting_started/effective_strategic.html