Enhancing Student Support
Project Communication Strategy: Phase 2

Understanding, Developing and Enriching the Student Experience

Contents
1. Enhancing Student Support Project Aims ................................................................. 2
   1.1 ESS Communication Strategy Aims ........................................................................ 2
2. ESS Communication Strategy Objectives: Phase 2 ................................................... 2
3. Audiences and Key Participants ................................................................................ 3
4. Key Messages: Enhancing Student Support: Improving the Student Experience .... 4
   4.1 Enhancing Student Support Project Campaigns .................................................. 4
5. Enhancing Student Support Project Measures of Success ....................................... 4
   5.1 Communication Strategy Outputs ......................................................................... 4
   5.2 Evaluation and Review ......................................................................................... 5
6. Communication Plan ................................................................................................. 5
7. Budget ...................................................................................................................... 6
8. Risk Management ..................................................................................................... 6
9. Some Project Team Contact Details .......................................................................... 6
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. We want to understand, develop and enrich the student experience. The overarching 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.

The Enhancing Student Support project includes:

- The Personal Tutor System, supported by Personal Tutor software, briefing, training materials and resources. In Phase 2, every undergraduate student will have a Personal Tutor and the system will be developed for extension to taught postgraduate students with effect from 2013/14.
- The Peer Support initiative. The University is working with EUSA towards the overall aim of ensuring that all full-time undergraduate students on campus will have access to peer support, see www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/peersupport.
- The Student Experience Project (SEP), which has task groups developing our approach to the following areas:
  - Emergency Response
  - Enhanced Selection
  - Online and Innovation in Student Services
  - Pre-Arrival and Induction
  - Student Communication
  - Student Information Points
  - Student Surveys.

1.1 ESS Communication Strategy Aims

The primary audiences for this ESS Project Communication Strategy, Phase 2, are the Student Support Implementation Group (SSIG), the SEP Steering Group and the ESS and SEP Teams. The Strategy was developed by the ESS Communications Working Group and SSIG. It sets out the communication aims, key messages and tools we will use in the second phase of the project. The ESS Communication Strategy aim is that:

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.

2. ESS Communication Strategy Objectives: Phase 2

The Enhancing Student Support Communication Strategy objectives are to:

- Raise the profile and awareness of Enhancing Student Support and the Student Experience Project at the University internally and, where appropriate, externally
- Provide timely information to staff and students about processes, resources and support
- Promote and support developing and evaluating the Enhancing Student Support and Student Experience projects by encouraging input and dialogue with students and staff
• Coordinate the way in which the University communicates with students about the ESS and SEP and therefore reduce the risk of non-strategic "over-communication" from disparate elements of the University.

Phase 2 ESS project communication will mainly focus on:

• Embedding the use of the Personal Tutor System for undergraduates and extending the Personal Tutor system to taught postgraduates from 2013/14
• The creation of the Student Experience Project, the appointment of staff to key roles and its initial outputs, e.g. the Student Information Points service, the work of the Student Surveys Unit, the initial plans to improve the pre-arrival and induction experience of students, and the developing focus on the purpose and value of effective student communications
• Gaining input to developing the Personal Tutor software
• Publicising the work with EUSA to develop Student Peer Support systems

The ESS Communication Calendar supplements the Communications Strategy. Its primary audience is those involved in delivering the projects, especially staff in Schools and Services. The Calendar sets out the timing of key messages for relevant project strands. 
https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/ESS+Communication+Calendar+-+Phase+2

3. Audiences and Key Participants
The ESS project has a number of audiences and stakeholders, which are detailed in the Phase 1 ESS Communications Strategy. https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/download/attachments/145822558/ESS-CommStrat-Phase1.pdf

In addition, staff with specific roles, e.g. Postgraduate Directors, Student Information Point staff, will also form key audiences. 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 Calendar: 
https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/ESS+Communication+Calendar+-+Phase+2

Enhancing Student Support is a University-wide project which is being delivered by staff and students from across the University.

The ESS and SEP Project Teams, the Student Support Implementation Group and the SEP Steering Group ensure that there is good, clear communication for all aspects of the project. The leaders of the ESS project strands and SEP Task Groups have roles in ensuring the appropriate delivery of key messages. The Student Communication Task Group’s remit goes beyond ESS communications and aims to improve communication with, and between, students and staff.

Contacts in Schools, Services and Colleges, Senior Tutor network and Student Support Team network will continue to be key networks for dialogue and communications.

The ESS project is supported by and reports to Learning and Teaching Committee, Central Management Group and the Principal’s Advisory Group for policy and resource advice.
4. Key Messages: Enhancing Student Support: Improving the Student Experience

The key over-arching message for the Enhancing Student Support project is:

We are committed to understanding, developing and enriching our students’ experience and providing all of our students with outstanding academic and pastoral guidance and high quality student support.

The University Strategic Plan notes that to create an outstanding student experience we will:

- “Revitalise our academic and pastoral support framework …
- Take a cohesive, inclusive and individualised approach to enhancing our student experience that encompasses all subjects, all modes of learning, all student services, and all parts of our estate.”

We want students to understand that we care deeply about the requirements of students and want them to participate fully in a 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 enrich the quality of the holistic student experience.

4.1 Enhancing Student Support Project Campaigns

The Enhancing Student Support project sits within the wider context of support for 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, e.g. the Personal Tutor System launch, Innovative Learning Week.

5. Enhancing Student Support Project Measures of Success

5.1 Communication Strategy Outputs

A variety of methods and media will be used to deliver key messages, depending on what is considered to be most effective for the target audience and the message itself. In the communication strand for Phase 2 of the ESS project, we aim to produce or further develop:

- A Communication Strategy for Phase 2
- A calendar which provides advance notice of key central project communications
- A table of the implementation activities and timescales for Schools for Phase 2
- Personal Tutoring Statements for each School
- Updated resource materials about the project, e.g. material available via the IAD website, e.g. student FAQs, staff FAQs
- The project wiki, which will expand to cover ESS and SEP
- A Student Experience Project web site
- Meetings of relevant networks, e.g. Senior Tutors, Student Support Teams, admissions officers
- Project participation in EUSA Learning Lunches and key College events
ESS Communication Strategy: Project Phase 2
24.4.13

- Plans for regular student newsletters
- Social media
- Showcasing events
- Powerpoint presentations which Schools can use for local delivery
- Workshops and briefing events
- Monthly e-updates
- Bulk emails and MyEd announcements when appropriate
- Publicity materials, including videos and articles in appropriate locations of the website
- A report on Phase 2

5.2 Evaluation and Review
In 2013/14, SSIG will review the Communication Strategy and use this to develop the projects and the ESS Communication Strategy for Phase 3. SSIG will wish to know whether 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. Effectiveness measures will be:

- The number of outputs achieved
- Number of hits on the wiki, attendees at events, presentations made
- Input from staff and students about
  - whether communications have increased their understanding of ESS work
  - how effectively we have promoted ESS aims and developments;
  - whether communications have been timely, effective and met their needs.

6. Communication Plan
The Enhancing Student Support and Student Experience Projects have multiple strands and communication needs to come from multiple sources. We will try to have effective, efficient and coordinated communication. **Who authorises** messages will depend on the level:

- University-wide messages, authorised by the ESS/SEP Teams
- University-wide **core-plus** messages, which Schools expand to provide local context. The University-wide core of the message is authorised by the ESS/SEP Teams.
- College messages, authorised by the relevant Dean
- School messages, authorised by the Senior Tutor, School Administrator or Head of School
- Messages from services, including EUSA, are authorised by the Head of Service
- Personal Tutor software development messages, authorised by the ESS/SEP Teams

When approving messages, those responsible will bear in mind **timing** factors. A timetable of activity and a calendar for key messages is maintained on the project wiki: [https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/ESS+Communication+Calendar+-+Phase+2](https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/ESS+Communication+Calendar+-+Phase+2)

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.

Using a **core-plus** method, where a core message is added to by a school or service, ensures consistency of message and enables local messages to be included. Senior Tutors are responsible for the local delivery of core messages when this approach is used.
A record of key University communications, copies of university-wide emails to staff and students and the regular ESS Updates are kept on the project wiki.

7. Budget
University-wide communications are managed from within existing budgets. School and College budgets were increased as part of the ESS project: their communications are managed within existing budgets. New developments proposed by the Student Communications Task Group will be considered within the SEP Project funding.

8. 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 calendar
- We don’t get effective feedback from users – use networks for input and insight
- We don’t motivate people to engage with activities, which are then not delivered effectively - be clear about the reasons and benefits of activities and ensure that people involved in project delivery are also involved in project development and communication

9. Project 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