Enhancing Student Support Project Communication, Report on Phase 1

As part of Phase 1 on the ESS project communications, the Student Support Implementation Group (SSIG) approved an ESS Project Communication Strategy, Phase 1, and an ESS Communication Timetable, Phase 1. Both of these are available on the ESS project wiki communications page:

https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Communication
https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/download/attachments/145822558/ESS-CommStrat-Phase1.pdf
https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Communication+Timetable+of+activity

The primary audience for the ESS Project Communication Strategy, Phase 1, is SSIG members and members of the ESS Project Team. The Strategy was developed by the ESS Communications Working Group and SSIG. It set out the communication aims, key messages and participants and the tools we would use in the first phase of the project. The ESS Communication Strategy aim for Phase 1 was 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.”

The Enhancing Student Support Communication Strategy, Phase 1 objectives were 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.

SSIG agreed that in Phase 1 of the ESS project communication would 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

The ESS Communication Timetable supplemented the ESS Project Communications Strategy, Phase 1. Its primary audience was those involved in delivering the project, especially staff in Schools and Services. For each project strand the timetable identified the key messages, the target audience, who would authorise and communicate the message, the communication method and due date.

Summary of Phase 1 Deliverables

In the communication strand for Phase 1 of the ESS project, we aimed to produce the following materials and deliverables. This report comments on what was produced, and provides some reflections for the future approach.

A Communication Strategy for Phase 1

This was agreed by SSIG and is on the wiki. It was very much a working document for SSIG members and members of the ESS Project Team. At its meeting on 18 December 2012 SSIG was asked to consider the
Strategy to inform the development of an ESS Communication Strategy for Phase 2. Initial comments from some members of the ESS Communications Task Group suggested that the Strategy was elaborate and overly detailed for a working document. This will be reflected in the Phase 2 Strategy.

**Communication Timetable**

An ESS Communication Timetable was produced that listed key communications relating to the Enhancing Student Support Project Phase 1 for July, August and September. It did not include meetings of the Student Support Implementation Group, the Senior Tutor Network, or other ESS project meetings, which can be found elsewhere on the ESS project wiki: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Home. The timetable provided a link to information on the IT tools project strand: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/SSG001/Implementation+tasks

Feedback from the Senior Tutor Network and Student Support Teams Network endorsed the approach taken in the timetable and suggested that it would be even more useful if greater advance notice could be provided on the key messages.

**Personal Tutoring Statements for each School**

Each School produced a Personal Tutoring Statement by September 2012. They were supported in this by a Contents Checklist for the Statement. The School Personal Tutoring Statements are available via the web: www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/students/undergraduate/personal-tutors/school-personal-tutoring-statements

Information about the Statements and how to access them, was emailed to all undergraduate students on 10 September 2012.

Web analytics for 11.2.12-13.3.13 show 1,623 page views, with 1,168 unique page views. Most views were in September 2012 when the system was launched. School Personal Tutoring Statements can also be accessed directly on each School webpages.

In developing the School Personal Tutoring Statements it became clear that there were certain common elements which it was helpful to provide centrally, e.g. standard text on Student Services https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Senior+Tutor+Network

The Deans of Students, who were all involved in approving the School Personal Tutoring Statements, have suggested that it would be helpful to have a standard template for the Statement, to be developed from good practice in current School PT Statements. This template will include the common links to the regulations, sources of support, etc. It will outline a structure for providing information on the standards and expectations that Schools are meeting, e.g. clear statements on when meetings will take place and with whom this will be, followed by the nature of the meeting. This has been approved by the STN and SSIG.

Discussions on writing records and confidentiality led to the production of a guidance note: Personal Tutor Recoding Notes: Brief on Confidentiality Issues and the creation of a School Protocol on Storing Sensitive Information for each School. The guidance will be reviewed on the basis of experience from this academic year.

https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/download/attachments/153654703/Brief-ConfidentialLevels.docx

**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 documents agreed as part of the project include the Roles and Responsibilities within the Personal Tutor System and the Academic and Pastoral Support Standards and Guiding Principles, both agreed in May 2012. School Personal Tutoring Statements link to these documents which are available via the web: www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/students/undergraduate/personal-tutors/personal-tutors

Information about resource materials for students and staff is linked to key web pages. Links were included
in emails to students and staff and regularly reported in the Enhancing Student Support updates. There is a separate report on ESS Phase 1 resource and training materials. Information for students and staff available via the IAD website and other key websites is highlighted in updates and on the wiki:

www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/institute-academic-development/undergraduate/apsupport/overview
www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/institute-academic-development/learning-teaching/academic-pastoral
www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/careers/staff/personal-tutor-support/home

Key networks for communication, e.g. contacts in Schools, Services and Colleges, Senior Tutor Network, Student Support Team Network

A contact list for ESS communications was developed from March 2012 onwards and used to distribute the monthly e-updates. This includes key staff in Schools, Services and Colleges and staff interested in the project.

A Senior Tutor Network was established as staff were appointed to this role. The STN is used for email communication with staff, to provide information and to seek input into project discussions. STN meetings began in July 2012 and are held on a monthly basis. They were initially chaired by the project sponsor but are now chaired by the College Deans of Students on a rotational basis.

https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Senior+Tutor+Network

A Student Support Team Network was also established as staff were appointed to their roles. The SSTN is used for email communication with staff, to provide information and to seek input into project discussions. SSTN meetings began in September 2012 and are held on a roughly monthly basis. They are currently chaired by the project sponsor but the SSTN is considering who should chair the meetings in due course.

https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Student+Support+Team+Network

A project wiki

The project wiki was launched in January 2012 and continues to expand with additional resources. It was used to share School updates and draft Personal Tutoring Statements so that Schools could share good practice. The wiki includes areas for the Student Support Implementation Group, STN and SSTN.

https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Home

A benchmarking event

A Benchmarking Event on the Enhancing Student Support project was held in March 2012. The event had external and internal presenters and over 100 participants. Two workshops sessions were held on aspects of Personal Tutors, one on student peer support and one on IT tools for personal tutor systems. Feedback from participants was very positive and the information gathered from the event was used to develop the project, for example, taking an outcomes-based approach.

https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Benchmarking+Event++Enhancing+Student+Support+-+13+March+2012

“Just wanted to feed back how worthwhile I found today’s event. As the student rep for PPLS I was worried I would find the event overly technical, but I actually found the talks thoroughly stimulating.” Abie Alfrey

Further benchmarking was conducted by desk research and there were presentations and a lunchtime benchmarking discussion before the 30 May SSIG meeting.

Information events in Schools and Colleges

Schools and Colleges held a variety of events which discussed the Enhancing Student Support project and delivery of Phase 1. Senior Tutors were and remain essential in cascading briefing to Schools and in reflecting School input back to the project. Senior Tutors use induction sessions, internal meetings with
Personal Tutors and School meeting reports as a way of communicating information about the progress of the ESS project implementation and the delivery of pastoral care.

**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**

Three sets of slides, with scripts, were prepared by the IAD, SACS and EUSA. Senior Tutors and others used or adapted these for use during local School or College briefing sessions. These provided an ESS overview of Personal Tutor Arrangements; IT Tools and Student Perspectives and were greatly welcomed by Senior Tutors and SSTs. The slides, and other resources for School and College Briefing Events, such as College handouts, were publicised via the ESS contacts and updates and are on the STN area of the wiki: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Senior+Tutor+Network

**Workshops and briefing events, e.g. “Personal Tutor IT Tools: Train the trainer”, “Personal Tutors: running lively and useful group meetings”**

Details of workshops and briefing events were included in the ESS communication timetable and were publicised via the ESS updates and email. Events provided included Personal Tutors IT Tools – Train the Trainers, Personal Tutors IT Tools – Hands on Training, EUCLID IT Tools Demonstration, Personal Tutors: running lively and useful group meetings, Personal Tutors: Students’ Mental Health Workshop. The report on ESS Phase 1 resource and training materials was publicised via SSIG and the ESS September update: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/download/attachments/153654703/ESS-ResourcesUpdate-20120901.pdf

**Monthly e-updates**

Since April 2012 regular ESS updates have been emailed to ESS contacts in Schools, Services and Colleges. They are also distributed to EUSA class representatives. The updates are posted on the wiki: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Communication

**Bulk emails and MyEd announcements when appropriate**

All staff and all student emails have been sent periodically during preparation for the launch of Phase 1. These included:

- emails about the launch of the project in January 2012;
- emails to continuing students in April 2012, to let them know what to do over the summer and what to expect on their return to the University;
- an email to School Directors of Teaching, Research, Graduate Schools and Quality, School Teaching and Research Administrators, and Key College administrators with information about the new Personal Tutor System roles in July 2012; and
- emails to staff, followed by targeted emails to new undergraduates, continuing undergraduates and postgraduates in September 2012, for the launch of ESS Phase 1 and the Personal Tutor system. The launch emails were accompanied by MyEd announcements. https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Communication

A University webpage with advice on the Personal Tutor system was developed for undergraduate students and publicised through emails. Web analytics for 1.7.12-28.2.13 show 11,661 page views, with 10, 432 unique page views. Most views were in mid-September 2012 when the system was launched. http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff-students/students/studies/undergraduate/tutor

**Publicity materials**

For Phase 1 of the project we went for a "soft" launch - making students and staff aware of the initiative and the new Personal Tutor system but not producing significant amounts of publicity material. We agreed
with CAM that later in the academic year we will review the decision not to produce posters, flyers etc. Publicity materials, like the undergraduate prospectus, the Edinburgh Experience and student services flyers, have been updated to reflect the Personal Tutor system.

**Video interviews for broadcast online explaining the new initiative**
Professor Ian Pirie, Assistant Principal Learning and Development, and Andrew Burnie, EUSA Vice President Academic Affairs, were interviewed about the Enhancing Student Support project. Copies of these videos are linked to Academic Services’ webpages. The December ESS update provides a link to information for Schools and others to embed the videos in their own websites:

www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/projects/enhancing-student-support/overview
www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/students/undergraduate/personal-tutors/benefits-for-students

**Articles in appropriate locations of the website**
There were web articles about the launch of the Enhancing Student Support project on the University web news pages; and about the launch of the Personal Tutor system, in Staff News and in the Autumn Bulletin. The University homepage has also recently featured information about the Personal Tutor system and supporting students.

**A final report on Phase 1**
This is the final report on communications within ESS Phase 1. It will contribute to an overall report on the first phase of the project.

**Reflection on Approach and Future Enhancements**
Feedback from SSIG, the Senior Tutor Network and Student Support Teams Network endorsed the approach taken in the ESS communications timetable and welcomed the ESS updates. Comments and suggestions for future improvements are:

- It would be even more useful if greater advance notice could be provided on key messages. In Phase 2 it is planned to produce an ESS communication calendar from April 2013, to provide earlier notice to staff.
- The timeliness of messages is important, with staff having advance notice of messages that are being sent to students. This will be taken into account in the calendar.
- The approach of having resources and material provided that can be adapted to local needs was welcomed.
- Greater attention needs to be paid to communications with students. This will be taken forward with the Student Communications Working Group, which forms part of the Student Support project part of ESS. Two new Student Communications Officers have been appointed. The project team will work with them on ESS student communications.
- It will be helpful for our various audiences to take a coordinated approach to communication about the Enhancing Student Support and Student Experience projects. This has been agreed with the SEP Project Manager. The Student Communications Officers have welcomed this suggestion.
- The experience gained this year will be used to review and revise our approach to key documents, for example the template approach to School Personal Tutoring Statements.
- Creating contacts lists has been time-consuming and we are concerned about their longer-term accuracy. IAD has begun exploring ways of improving this and we will take this work forward with CAM and IS.
- Appropriate publicity materials to be used in ESS project publicity will be explored with CAM.
• The audience and purpose of the ESS Communications Strategy needs to be considered, with the aim of simplifying and streamlining it. A revised ESS Project Communication Strategy for Phase 2 will be discussed at the March SSIG with the aim of approving it at the April SSIG.

• The Communications Timetable as a record of key communications aimed to capture key central communications. It is recognised that it is not practical to record all School and Service key communications about the project. The Senior Tutor Network has commented that the focus on central messages is appropriate and Schools will be aware of local messages.

• With a greater number of strands and activities to include, we are considering whether it is possible to make the Timetable more of a calendar of what launches when and states when campaigns will run. The specific outputs, e.g. like those listed in the timetable, phase 1, could be detailed in individual operational level plans for specific strands or activities.

• In addition to emails, articles and documentation, we will explore what other events are needed to engage key stakeholders, e.g. Heads of School, with the project.

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19.3.13