Enhancing Student Support Mid-year Update, 28.3.13

This is the mid-year Update on the Enhancing Student Support project. Further details can be found on the Enhancing Student Support wiki: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Home

1. Thank you for the launch of Personal Tutor system

In introducing this mid-year update from the Enhancing Student Support project I would like to thank you for your hard work and support. A significant amount of work and commitment goes into supporting students and enriching their experience - this is greatly valued.

All undergraduate students now have Personal Tutors, Student Support Teams and Senior Tutors in their Schools and a Dean of Students in their College. Plans to implement the Personal Tutor (PT) system for all taught postgraduates from 2013/14 are well under way; Schools and Services are busy developing Student Peer Support systems in partnership with EUSA; and work on the Student Experience Project has begun, involving staff and students from across the University.

“Even in the first year of the Personal Tutor system many students have begun to see a real difference in the support they receive. Having a Student Support Team within a School means students always have quick access to the advice and support they need. I’ve had lots of good feedback on changes so far which I’m sure will continue over the remainder of the project.”
Andrew Burnie, EUSA Vice President Academic Affairs

This update gives you details of our current activities. If you would like to become involved directly in the ESS project and any of its various work strands, please email essproj@exseed.ed.ac.uk Thank you for your continued support.

Professor Ian Pirie, Assistant Principal Learning and Development, Ian.Pirie@ed.ac.uk

2. Student Experience Project - understanding, developing and enriching the student experience

This part of ESS was formerly known as the Student Support Project and has been renamed the Student Experience Project (SEP). It is working primarily through seven core task groups, ensuring that it has both a broad and in-depth focus on key thematic areas of relevance to the student experience. Mark Wilkinson joined the SEP team as Project Manager in January 2013. If you have any overarching questions about the project, please direct them to M.Wilkinson@ed.ac.uk. A Guide for Staff on Enhancing Student Support, which includes information on the SEP, is available on the wiki: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/download/attachments/145045254/StaffGuideESS-SEP.pdf

2.1. Student Surveys
We are gathering more feedback than ever before and launched the Edinburgh Student Experience Survey (ESES) for non-final year undergraduates in January. This ran alongside the National Student Survey which seeks the views of final year undergraduates on their programme of study and the University as a whole. Postgraduate students have also been surveyed in the PTES (Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey) from January 2013 and PRES (Postgraduate Research Experience Survey) from March 2013. Findings will be used to enhance the student experience. www.ed.ac.uk/staff-students/students/surveys

Forthcoming activity includes work with the College Deans of Quality (and equivalents) to develop a survey to evaluate the Personal Tutor system, which will be run early in semester 1 next academic year. If you have any questions please contact student.surveys@ed.ac.uk.

2.2. Pre-Arrival and Induction
The newly formed Student Induction team is organising an event for academic and support staff who organise and deliver induction/orientation sessions for new students. This 9 April half-day event, Gearing up for Induction 2013: Enhancing the experience of students transitioning to University, aims to give key members of staff the opportunity to network and share good practice. It provides an opportunity to hear about the induction team’s work and to see how cross-departmental collaboration might occur in the future. The event includes three interactive
sessions: Mapping Current Good Practice at the University of Edinburgh, Identifying 4 Aspects of Transition in our Induction Practices and Challenges and Barriers to Enhancing Induction. A Show and Tell session will highlight examples of good induction and transition practices. Show and tell practitioners come from EUSA, Accommodation Services - Residence Life, Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, Humanities and Social Sciences, and the Distance Education Initiative.

2.3. Student Information Points
Student Information Points have been established at the George Square Library and the Murray Library at Kings Buildings. SIP staff operate a weekly outreach system at all of the other key campus locations. The team sponsored a student design competition and a new graphic has been selected to help brand the service. In Semester 1, 3541 enquiries were dealt with - 77% were resolved by SIP, 18% referred to student services and the remaining 5% referred to Schools. The SIP can be contacted in person, by email (infopoint@ed.ac.uk) and text, see http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff-students/students/student-services/info-points

2.4. Other SEP Activities: Enhanced Selection, Emergency Response, Student Communications and Online and Innovation in Student Services
- We are developing and piloting admissions selection criteria that value diversity and reflect the skills, attributes and knowledge needed to succeed at Edinburgh. They will communicate expectations and the nature of our programmes to candidates before they apply.
- The Emergency Response task group will report soon on the current support arrangements for students in emergency and crisis situations and will make recommendations and consider the implications for implementation.
- Two new Student Communication Officers are working with colleagues in Communication and Marketing to consider and develop effective student communication practices to enrich the student experience. Recent examples include publicising the current student surveys, undertaking student focus groups to better understand students’ views about how the University communicates with them, and promoting the Innovative Learning Week.
- The Online and Innovation in Student Services group is exploring innovative approaches to web-based student support mechanisms and tools and considering how best to foster and enhance collaboration, and integrated working between the University's student support services and Colleges/Schools.

3. Personal Tutors for Taught Postgraduate Students
Last month we wrote to all Schools to update them on postgraduate taught (PGT) developments in relation to the Enhancing Student Support project. The Student Support Implementation Group (SSIG) had agreed a set of initial principles for the implementation of Personal Tutors at PGT level and a paper on this was circulated to Schools for cascading to relevant staff. The paper highlighted issues for discussion and ways to feed back School views through representatives on the PGT Subgroup. Meetings with relevant staff were held in Colleges in February and March.

SSIG has agreed that postgraduate taught students will have at least two individual meetings with their Personal Tutor and two group meetings in the taught part of their degree programme and one individual meeting in the research part. Also, if students are not on campus, for example because they are studying abroad for a period, are on placement, or are studying an online degree, then meetings may take place by telephone, live internet calls, Collaborate, etc.

School discussions on implementation are on-going and you are encouraged to give your comments to your School Director of Postgraduate Studies (or equivalent). The consultation on implementing the Personal Tutor system for PGTs will move into a delivery-focus soon (item 4).

4. School Personal Tutoring Statements for 2013/14
Schools will be producing revised School Personal Tutoring Statements for 2013/14. SSIG is approving a template for the Statements, which will be circulated to Senior Tutors in early April. The 2013/14 School PT Statements will include information for undergraduates, taught postgraduates, online distance education students and students on placements. Senior Tutors will be asked to submit their draft School Statements to essproj@exseed.ed.ac.uk by the end of May.
5. Support for Research Postgraduate Students

From September 2013 we will review the support arrangements for postgraduate research (PGR) students. At present there are no plans for Personal Tutors for PGR students, but we aim to use what we have learned from the PT development to further enhance our PGR experience. The review will look at the postgraduate research student lifecycle from admission to graduation and the additional staff arrangements, tools and resource materials to support students and staff.

6. Benchmarking Event

A successful ESS Benchmarking Event was held on 19 February 2013. The morning focused on Student Peer Support and the afternoon on Support for Postgraduate Students. Over 100 staff and students participated, sharing good practice, hearing about innovations in other areas, and shaping developments. 
https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Benchmarking+Event+-+19+February+2013

7. Update on Peer Support

This has been a successful year for the launch of the Peer Support Project. Every School across the University now has in place Peer Support Schemes or is working towards launching pilot projects for undergraduates in at least one year group by AY 13/14. The Peer Support Toolkit will be available on the IAD website over the coming weeks and will include all the research, resources and support materials needed to set up and manage a Peer Support Project. We are moving into implementation and Schools and their students should be thinking about recruiting and training the volunteers needed to make the project a success. Further publicity, including a logo which can be used across all Peer Support Projects, will soon be available. See http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/peersupport

8. ESS Calendar of Key Communications

The Senior Tutor and Student Support Teams Networks endorsed the approach taken last summer in the ESS communications timetable. A suggested improvement is to provide greater advance notice of key messages and events in the ESS Phase 2 Key Communication Calendar. The Calendar is being populated in April and will be updated throughout Phase 2. We are also developing a table of the implementation activities and timescales for Schools for Phase 2. 
https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/ESS/Communication+Calendar+-+Phase+2

9. Resources for staff

Online resources for personal tutors, student support teams and others continue to be added to the IAD website (http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/institute-academic-development/learning-teaching/academic-pastoral/support). This includes links to the Careers Service Guide for Personal Tutors, adaptable study development resources and IT tool user guides. These resources are being reviewed at the moment and will be adapted to incorporate taught postgraduate requirements. Please send comments or suggestions for new resources to Jon Turner, j.d.turner@ed.ac.uk.

10. Personal Tutor software

Since the initial IT Personal Tutor software tools were launched for Semester 1 2012/13 we have made a number of continual small improvements including:
- for notes, meetings and comments the ability to enter formatted text, to add up to three files and to flag as deleted;
- notifications of student meeting requests via MyEd going to both the Personal Tutor and the Student Support Team and including the student’s email address;
- updates to the Student Disability Services software and the ability for staff and students to add meetings to their electronic diary.

Further work is in the pipeline to support small group functions and the extension to PGT students: please be aware that this will simplify the display of the Semester 1 and Semester 2 meeting types into one meeting type which can accommodate both semester meetings and additional meetings as required, so staff and students will continue to see small changes over the coming months.

The Enhancing Student Support Team, essproj@exseed.ed.ac.uk