

The University of Edinburgh

Senatus Academicus

16 June 2010

**Academic and Pastoral Support at Edinburgh:
Standards and Guiding Principles**

Brief description of the paper

The paper sets out the agreed standards required of the provision of academic and pastoral support at the University of Edinburgh, together with a framework of guiding principles. They were drawn up by a Task Group of the Learning and Teaching Committee in consultation with a range of other relevant committees and post-holders. It is proposed that the standards and guiding principles are implemented with effect from the beginning of the next academic year, and that their effectiveness is reviewed after twelve months by the Learning and Teaching Committee.

Action requested

Senatus is invited to approve the standards and guiding principles for academic and pastoral support at the University.

Resource implications

Does the paper have resource implications? There will be implications for staff time and effort in implementing the standards and guiding principles.

Risk Assessment

Does the paper include a risk analysis? No. If concerns about consistency of quality of provision are not adequately addressed, we risk compromising our standing with students and our wider reputation.

Equality and Diversity

Does the paper have equality and diversity implications? No

Freedom of Information

Can this paper be included in open business? Yes.

Other relevant information

The paper will be presented by Vice Principal Dai Hounsell.

Originator of the Paper

Learning & Teaching Committee Task Group on Academic and Pastoral Support
4 June 2010

Academic and Pastoral Support at Edinburgh: Standards and Guiding Principles

Background and Introduction

1. The Task Group on Academic and Pastoral Support for Students was set up by the Learning and Teaching Committee in autumn 2009, following a review by the Principals' Strategy Group (PSG) of the draft report and recommendations of an earlier Review Panel.
2. PSG acknowledged that improvements were needed in the provision of support to students, but expressed reservations about the cost-effectiveness of the measures proposed previously and the extent to which account had been taken of differences in practices and approaches across the Colleges to academic and pastoral provision.
3. It was clear to the Task Group that if students' concerns about inconsistencies in the quality of provision were to be adequately addressed, the following would be necessary:
 - a. to clarify the roles and functions of Directors of Studies (DoSs) and equivalent advisors within and across the Colleges and vis-à-vis central support services
 - b. to underscore the importance for all students of clear 'local' points of contact/back-up, follow-up and referral (centering on Teaching Organisations or Teaching Offices)
 - c. to propose where responsibility should lie, within Schools and Colleges, for oversight of academic and pastoral support as a whole and the effectiveness of the (DoSs) system in particular
 - d. to set out what would be expected of students and their advisors if the system of student support was to function effectively and efficiently
 - e. to set out procedures for regular and more systematic monitoring of the quality of academic and pastoral support to students, locally and centrally
 - f. to complement the above with equivalent guidelines to assure effective provision of student support by the University's central services. There are over 20 central services providing support for students.
4. The Task Group considered that these objectives could best be met by drawing up, in consultation with other relevant individuals and bodies, a University-wide framework of Standards and Guiding Principles, for approval by Senatus.

Recommendation

5. The Task Group invites the Senatus to approve the *Academic and Pastoral Support at Edinburgh: Standards and Guiding Principles* set out below. It is proposed that these are implemented with effect from the beginning of the next academic year, and that their effectiveness is reviewed after twelve months by the Learning and Teaching Committee. Implementation actions are outlined in Appendix 1 of the paper.

Learning & Teaching Committee Task Group on Academic and Pastoral Support, 4 June 2010

Membership of the Task Group

Dai Hounsell, Vice Principal, Academic Enhancement [Convenor]
Evan Beswick, EUSA
Shelagh Green, Careers Service
Fanny Kristmundsdottir, CMVM
Nora Mogey, Information Services/Institute for Academic Development
Colin Pulham, Director of Teaching, Chemistry
Sarah Purves, EUSA
Graeme Reid, Director of Teaching, Biological Sciences
Janet Rennie, CHSS
Ruth Stewart, CMVM
Steven Warrington, Engineering
Vivienne McFarlane, Registry Academic Services [Secretary]

ACADEMIC AND PASTORAL SUPPORT AT EDINBURGH

Standards and Guiding Principles

a. Preamble

Aims

1. The aim of this document is to set out standards and guiding principles for the provision of academic and pastoral support to students across the University. Support arrangements are a blend of localised provision, within Schools and Colleges, complemented by a range of specialist central services. Local frameworks of support differ in a variety of ways from School to School, depending on level of study and how teaching and learning are organised and support delivered to the students concerned. The *Standards and Guiding Principles* do not, therefore, prescribe a uniform approach. Instead they seek to ensure that there is clarity amongst all students and staff about the scope, nature and accessibility of support within each School and College and centrally, and that provision consistently exceeds threshold standards across the University.
2. Underpinning the *Standards and Guiding Principles* is the expectation that all members of the University, whether staff or students, treat one another fairly, courteously and equitably, with mutual respect and understanding.

b. Student Support in Schools and Colleges

Key Point of Contact

3. Within each School, there must be a readily accessible, student-facing office (e.g. the teaching organisation, a subject or departmental office) which serves as the primary point of contact for students seeking advice and information. It should ensure that students' enquiries or requests are promptly and courteously dealt with, and that where necessary students are directed to the appropriate member of staff or source of information. Where a member of staff is not available, it is the responsibility of the School to provide an alternative point of contact.

Scope and Focus of Provision

4. Whatever framework of support is available within a School, there must be provision for all its registered students, whether undergraduate or postgraduate, full or part-time, home or international, campus-based or online/distance. In the case of the latter, Schools will need to spell out how and what support can practicably be provided.
5. Schools are also expected to identify when and where the need for informed guidance and support may be at its most acute (e.g. on induction and in a student's first few weeks as an undergraduate or postgraduate; during the process of progression to honours), and to target and concentrate provision accordingly.

Clarity and Communication

6. Each School must inform the students taking its courses and programmes about the academic and pastoral guidance and support available to them, and how to access it. This information must be updated annually and will desirably take a variety of forms (paper, online, face-to-face communication).
7. It must be clear to students in each School:
 - a. what the first point of contact is for students seeking academic or pastoral advice, and what the fallback contact is should the first not be available.
 - b. who to approach, within and beyond the school, for different kinds of information, advice and support.
 - c. what guidance and support can appropriately be expected, and how promptly, from within the school.

- d. what other sources of information and support beyond the school students can be alerted or referred to.
- e. what is expected of students to ensure that queries and concerns are promptly raised and pursued.
- f. how a student should proceed where the need for advice is perceived as urgent.
- g. how a student can seek a change in their designated director of studies or other advisor.
- h. how a student can lodge a complaint when the promptness or adequacy of the support available falls below the standards of provision set.

Roles, Responsibilities and Expectations

8. Within Colleges and Schools, a key role in academic and pastoral support to undergraduate students is played by the *Director of Studies (DoS)*. For Masters and other taught postgraduates, that role is typically played by their programme directors, while for postgraduate research students it is their research supervisors. Since it is desirable that all such students should, if they so wish, be able to seek academic or pastoral guidance from a third party, Schools should designate one or more staff to fulfil this back-up role. The respective responsibilities of directors of studies and their student directees are chiefly as follows:

<i>Expectations of Directors of Studies and equivalent advisors</i>	<i>Expectations of Students</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to welcome new directees, and to follow the progress of all of their students • to guide the students in their course choices and advise them on study difficulties • to offer advice and support when personal or health problems are affecting the students' studies • to refer the students where appropriate to more specialist sources of information and guidance • to provide a reference for a future employer or programme of study • to respond promptly (normally within three working days) to a request for contact; where this is not feasible, the DoS should alert the relevant person in the School • should the case arise, to advise and support the student in eg Special Circumstances, disciplinary or appeal matters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to check their University email account regularly for communications from their director of studies, and to respond promptly to requests for information • to ensure their details are up-to-date on MyEd. This includes updating contact details, and notifying DoS of any discrepancies in course details • to meet with their director when asked to do so • to inform their director in good time of any problems affecting their studies, and so enable effective support to be offered • to provide DoS with background information s/he needs, e.g. to advise on Special Circumstances or to write a reference • to take due account of advice or information given • to make themselves aware of regulations and procedures relevant to their studies, and to seek advice where they are unsure of what is required

Limits of Pastoral Responsibilities

- 9. While Directors of Studies and other academic and administrative staff have a responsibility for supporting students, they are not usually qualified to provide specialised pastoral care, nor expected to do so. Consequently, in cases where a student appears to be experiencing severe distress (e.g. serious physical or mental health problems), he or she should be encouraged to seek appropriate professional help.
- 10. It may occasionally be necessary for School staff to establish explicit boundaries regarding the type and amount of support that they can offer, especially if the student is reluctant to seek professional support or if their behaviour is having a disruptive effect on others. The Head of School (or their delegate) and the relevant College Dean [see 19. below] must always be consulted in such cases.

11. Very occasionally, in cases where there is perceived to be a serious risk to the safety of the student or of others, it will be necessary for the usual principles of confidentiality to be superseded by the need to seek assistance from appropriate agencies (e.g. health services or police).

Monitoring and Quality Assurance

12. Each School and College must ensure that the adequacy of guidance and support arrangements is monitored annually through quality assurance procedures, and that appropriate action is taken to address reasonable student concerns. Monitoring should combine information-gathering within the School (for example, via course or programme questionnaires and staff-student liaison committees) and scrutiny of relevant external sources such as National Student Survey data.
13. The outcomes of monitoring within Schools must form part of the annual quality assurance procedures of College and Senatus Quality Assurance Committees and be incorporated into periodic subject reviews (e.g. TPRs and PPRs).
14. Monitoring of the quality of provision across Schools should be complemented by the use of staff review procedures (PDR/appraisal) to keep under review the effectiveness of all academic and support staff in student advisory and support roles.

Briefing, Training and Development

15. An effective framework of support depends on the knowledge and skills of all those staff – academic, administrative, clerical and technical – who have responsibility for providing information and guidance. Schools and Colleges must therefore ensure that adequate opportunities are in place for briefing, training and updating, and that these are taken up by the various members of staff concerned. Formal training opportunities will be supplemented by informal training and mentorship/ongoing training which Schools will be able to tailor to suit their own needs.
16. Initial and continuing professional development opportunities should desirably be a blend of local and central provision, with the aim of ensuring that on the one hand, there is attention to College- and School-specific needs and practices, and on the other, expertise and insights are shared across the University, standards are consistent, and there is effective interchange between local providers and central services and mutual understanding of respective strengths.
17. In such professional development activities, it is particularly important that consideration is given to the growing diversity of the University's students and its implications for support needs and provision.

Oversight and Accountability

18. How responsibilities for providing and overseeing student guidance and support are allocated may vary from one School to another, but overall responsibility rests with each Head of School for ensuring that an appropriate framework of provision is in place and that it is working well. The expectation is that students would retain the same Director of Studies/equivalent advisor throughout their programme, whenever possible.
19. Similarly Colleges, through their Deans of Learning and Teaching and their Learning and Teaching Committees or equivalent, are responsible for overseeing the quality of provision across Schools. Job descriptions and committee remits should reflect this.

c. Central Support for Students

Introduction

20. A wide range of student support, in academic, pastoral, administrative and domestic areas, is made available to students through central support services, which are a vital complement to provision in Schools and Colleges. The effectiveness of these services, and the cohesion between them and the wider academic University community, are fundamental to a high quality student experience.

21. Many support providers operate to benchmarks, kite marks or professional standards which are specific to the nature and context of the service they provide. A blanket response would be unhelpful and potentially restrictive. Articulating a defined set of guiding principles will, however, help in managing expectations and ensuring that provision is fit for purpose and responsive to changing student needs.

Expectations and Standards

22. Central providers of support services to students are expected to make clear, through a range of appropriate channels:
 - the services and support they offer
 - who can access these services
 - an initial point of contact and advice on the best method of communication
22. Such services should deal with requests and enquiries accurately, promptly and efficiently, publishing a clear description of what students and their advisers can expect from them, including response times. They should also make every effort to find the answer to a query or, where necessary, refer students to the relevant person, section or department.
23. Service units should maintain and develop effective links with other areas of the University, EUSA and external organisations in order to facilitate effective referral and coherent delivery of student support. They also contribute to professional development programmes for staff in Colleges and Schools with responsibilities for student support.
24. Where a service is not able to offer support to a student, a clear explanation must be given of the reasons for not doing so.
25. All staff delivering the service are expected to be appropriately qualified, trained and supported in their roles, to ensure an appropriately high quality service is delivered.
26. Services must seek regular feedback from users, and make clear who students should contact with a complaint, compliment or suggestion. They will also make clear how any complaint will be handled.
27. Services must also monitor and review their performance regularly, taking on board and acting upon feedback from students and Colleges, while respecting and utilising the professional expertise inherent within the service, publicising results as required.
28. Services should strive to develop and enhance their provision wherever appropriate and feasible, ensuring that the services they offer are supportive of the University's wider goals and consistently meet the realistic expectations of the changing student population.
29. Services are expected to participate in appropriate quality assurance processes within the University and/or within their professional arena.

d. Sustaining the Quality of Student Support University-wide

30. The University's website should directly link students and their advisers to a centrally maintained list of regularly updated information, including Frequently Asked Questions about academic and pastoral support. This facility would help achieve greater accuracy, accessibility, speed and consistency in the provision of information and advice.
31. These *Standards and Guiding Principles* are subject to endorsement by Senatus. Once approved, it will be the responsibility of the University's Learning and Teaching Committee to review them and amend and update them as necessary.

LTC Task Group on Academic and Pastoral Support

Implementing the *Standards and Guiding Principles: Summary of Actions*

ACTION NEEDED BY ...	ACTION TO BE TAKEN	RELEVANT PARAGRAPH
Schools	Nominate/confirm the key point[s] of contact (e.g. the Teaching Organisation/Teaching Office) within each School	3
	Review nature and adequacy of provision for all students in the School, ensuring that provision is targeted and concentrated appropriately	4-5, 9-10
	Clarify and communicate to all students and staff the nature, scope and availability of support, procedures for seeking support, expectations of students and staff, and back-up and complaints procedures	6-11
Heads of Schools	Incorporate into appraisal/PDR procedures scrutiny of the effectiveness of School staff in advising and supporting students	14
Heads of Schools	Verify that an appropriate framework of support is in place across the School and that it is working well.	18
Schools and Colleges	Ensure through QA procedures that guidance and support are subject to annual monitoring and appropriate action is taken to address reasonable student concerns identified	12-13
	Ensure that adequate opportunities are in place for briefing, training and updating, and that these are taken up by the various members of staff concerned.	15-17
	Liaise with IAD and central services to blend local and central staff development provision and ensure consideration is given to student diversity and its implications	16-17
Heads of Colleges	Designate responsibility for oversight of effectiveness and quality student support to the College Dean of Learning and Teaching or equivalent, modifying job description and allocation/buyout of time as appropriate	18-19
	Amend as appropriate remit of College Learning and Teaching Committee or equivalent	19
Central services with a role in student support	Ensure that there is clear communication to students and staff about the nature, scope, service standards and availability of support offered, incl. complaints procedures; that their performance is regularly monitored and reviewed; and that they continue where practicable to develop and enhance provision	22-29
Institute for Academic Development	Review and strengthen training and development opportunities for all staff with a role in student support, to complement briefing and updating arrangements within Schools and Colleges	15-17
Registry Academic Services	Establish and maintain, for students and their advisers, a central list of information and advice (incl. FAQs) about academic and pastoral support	30
Senatus Learning and Teaching Committee	Put in place steps to review and update the <i>Standards and Guiding Principles</i> .	31