Wellbeing: At the Heart of Student Services

As Director of Student Services, I am delighted that this issue is dedicated to our work, with a particular focus on student wellbeing. Running Student Services at the University of Dundee is like running the services of a small town, providing a wide range of support which enhances the wellbeing of the entire University community. We provide all students - whether full-time, part-time, distance learners, or on our campuses at Ninewells and Kirkcaldy - with the support they require from matriculation to graduation and beyond. All staff can also access our services, as well as directing students towards us.

STUDENT SERVICES IS NOW ORGANISED INTO FOUR KEY HUBS

**THE SKILLS HUB** is built around three key areas: Academic Skills Centre (ASC), the Careers Service, and English for International Students (EIS). ASC works with all Schools across the University, providing opportunities for students and staff to develop the key learning and teaching skills essential to ensuring a high quality student experience. As well as workshops and one-to-one sessions, ASC is working to embed academic skills into the curriculum, and has recently produced online resources such as Essay Bites. The team also deliver the credit-bearing STEP UP modules, which help students develop the appropriate academic skills for their university studies. The Careers Service, which encompasses the Centre of Entrepreneurship, not only provides one-to-one support for those wishing to build their careers or businesses, but is also very much involved in running events such as Careers Fairs and business competitions. The team also teaches around 450 students each year on a range of modules including internships, career planning and enterprise. EIS attracts increasing numbers of international students wishing to improve their language skills. The pre-sessional programmes bring around 180 international students a year, generating substantial income for the University. The in-sessional programmes provide vital English language support to non-native speakers, enabling them to successfully build their academic careers at Dundee.

**THE ENQUIRY CENTRE** is the first port of call for any student or staff member seeking information or help on anything as diverse as replacing a student card to seeking help with personal welfare issues. Students can also access the International Advice Service and the Residences Office at The Enquiry Centre. (see page 3)

**THE SUPPORT HUB** offers a range of specialist services and handles more complex cases in the areas of health and wellbeing, disability and student funding. (see page 2)

**THE REGISTRY** is the administrative backbone of the University and is responsible for organising key University events, including matriculation, exams and graduation. This is also where the timetable is managed along with student records and fees.

A recent addition to the Student Services’ offering is the very successful Global Room, which has been accessed by over 30,000 students and celebrated its first birthday on St Andrews day. The University Nursery, which offers up to 100 places for the babies and children of students and staff is operationally managed from within Student Services.

Student wellbeing is the key thread that runs throughout all of Students Services. The focus on mental health, in common with all other western universities, is gaining increased prominence here in the University, as reflected in the additional investment providing four new posts in this area this year. All of the above services, as measured by the National Student Survey and the International Student Barometer, make a significant contribution to the retention, progression and wellbeing of students at Dundee. Our enhancement-led approach ensures that we put the needs of students and staff first in all we do. We are very grateful to Dundee University Students’ Association (DUSA), whose strong approach to partnership working makes a considerable difference to our combined effectiveness in the delivery of services for students, including those around resilience and wellbeing.

Graham Nicholson,
Director of Student Services

DUSA Executive work with Student Services

Dundee University Students’ Association (DUSA) and Student Services work as a partnership to deliver the best support for our students. We collaborate on events regarding student welfare, keeping safe, academic support, period poverty, part-time job guide and many more. These events are directed at students to engage them in different aspects of student life, and to promote healthy habits that can be taken forward beyond university life. We promote welfare on both fronts and provide advice for a wide range of issues that could arise during a student’s journey. It’s not only limited to the many campaigns we set up each year; we also work with Student Services to distribute funding for students facing hardship and ensure students’ voices are heard when decisions are being made. DUSA is involved with interviewing new staff members to add in a student perspective to the implementation of the new Equally Safe initiative. University isn’t only about studying though, it’s about preparing for the future as well. We set up Think Ahead that provides students another opportunity to explore their options in collaboration with the many events that the Careers Service provides. We also support students who face academic and mental health issues, which we tackle by collaborating with the appropriate area in Student Services for the best interest of the students.

Joely Nicol,
Vice President of Student Welfare, DUSA
The Support Hub, located in The Old Technical Institute immediately behind the Tower Building, provides a central, accessible space for University Health, Disability, Counselling, Funding and Occupational Health Services. Each Service has a specific, confidential role, but their co-location enables convenience for service users, who include students and staff.

FOCUS ON: the University Health Service

We are a small team that works with students and staff who are experiencing a wide range of health issues, or are seeking related advice. A large part of our work is with people who are mentally unwell, to whom we offer specialist assessment and individualised care.

We regard self-management and improvement as essential to long-term health and wellbeing, and we undertake a huge amount of promotion around this with individuals, as well as within mental health-related training sessions. Liasing with the Institute of Sport and Exercise, we jointly administer the supported exercise element of the Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds initiative, which numerous students have reported very positively on in terms of health improvement.

Whilst strongly encouraging students to register and engage with their own local GPs, we have retained Dr Panna Muquit for 2-3 short clinics per week. These are available to students and staff and can be used by those who are experiencing a minor illness or injury, not registered with a local GP or experiencing difficulties securing an appointment. We also undertake STI testing, health-related signposting and quite a lot of distress management.

Our philosophy is that every interaction that we have with those using our Service, and indeed across the University community, should be characterised with compassion, respect and kindness, even when one may not be able to immediately resolve the presenting issues. We have learned that when unwell or purely distressed, many people benefit enormously from a positive human interaction and that that first contact can make a critical difference to them and their journey thereafter.

Fiona Grant, Senior Nurse Mental Health

FOCUS ON: Disability Services

Disability Services provides a range of confidential services for disabled students and staff. The demand for our services has increased annually and there are currently over 1,400 students registered with our Service and over 100 staff. We also offer a needs assessment service to disabled students at other universities and colleges through our regional Access Centre, and typically receive over 200 such referrals each year. In addition, we offer a range of disability-related training for University staff, including deaf awareness, inclusive practice, dyslexia, mental health difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders.

Developments this year include commissioning the University’s SANE dog, Hope, to promote and maintain awareness of the importance of mental health and wellbeing for all members of the University community. Hope’s arrival on campus was widely publicised in the local media and a successful launch event was recently organised with support from our Enquiry Centre colleagues. In addition, Disability Services was instrumental in writing the University’s British Sign Language (BSL) Plan following consultation with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders. We also ran another successful transition event this year for students with autistic spectrum and anxiety disorders. Such students can find the transition to university particularly difficult due to the significant changes experienced and the unfamiliar environment. This year we introduced a follow-up evening social event that was also very well received.

Shirley Hill, Head of Disability Services
The Enquiry Centre represents all of Student Services at a generalist level and is located beside the Dundee University Students’ Association (DUSA) The Union entrance. We aim to help anyone that is not sure where, what or who to ask: we are a first point of contact for welcoming new students, and assisting with queries (whether big or small), support and advice, on anything from travel, accommodation, money issues, study support, wellbeing matters to careers advice. We will refer on to other professional services as required and help students to ‘Stay On Course’ (another Enquiry Centre initiative!).

The following snapshot of activities gives an idea of what keeps the wider Enquiry Centre pastoral team busy.

Andrea is the Enquiry Centre Coordinator and keeps the Centre running smoothly, organising events for our own self-development, and ensuring all the various activities go to plan. Caitlin is at our main desk welcoming visitors and helping with the many administrative tasks, preparing and issuing lost ID cards and keeping information stands up to date. Rhona helps with campaigns, promoting educational and community building events in the Enquiry Centre and beyond, while working closely with the Global Room team.

Pat leads the work of 16 Student Support Assistants based within the University residences. This team supports students, encouraging the skills of mutual respect, cooperation and appreciation for each other. Moving from home to a University residence can be difficult; we all know that learning to budget, and sharing household chores and facilities can take some practice so Pat and the team are there to assist when help is needed. The University promotes the Re:Life initiative which aims to encourage engagement and a sense of belonging to a community. Examples of activities include board game and chess events, cinema outings, group visits to local attractions, competitions, craft events, walking groups, and pizza nights in.

The Residences Office team (Neil, Charlotte and Aileen) are also based in the Enquiry Centre, receiving and managing applications for the University residences and private residence arrangements. The team liaise with our accommodation management partners Sanctuary Students to ensure all arrivals are expected and welcomed to their accommodation.

Stuart offers general wellbeing support for students, assists our Residences team at the busiest parts of the year and is leading on the project ‘StudentPad,’ in partnership with Abertay University. This online facility will improve private accommodation information and options for older students and those with a partner or family, as well as visiting staff.

Joan is our main Stress Buster champion for students facing anxiety issues. As well as Stress Buster workshops before exam periods, Joan delivers ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) and SafeTALK training, equipping staff and students with the skills to recognise and support those with suicidal ideation. Joan is also responsible for coordinating the Peer Connections volunteers and assisting with campaigns and Welcome events. She is also Care Contact for students who have experienced care prior to coming to university.

Michael works with us supporting students’ general wellbeing matters alongside his work in the Academic Skills Centre and his position as an Honorary Chaplain.

Following the Scottish Government’s Equally Safe Strategy, Sarah has recently joined the team to focus on gender violence prevention and education within the University community. Supporting the work of the University’s Equally Safe Group, Sarah will coordinate resources and training for students and staff, empowering students to feel safe while on campus and taking skills beyond graduation to improve society in future years. (see ‘Highlighted’ page 4)

The Enquiry Centre regularly hosts other Student Services Drop-in services such as Careers and Student Funding as well as the Citizens Advice Bureau appointments on Tuesday afternoons during term. The International Advice team offer appointments at the Enquiry Centre and self-help Fact Sheets are readily available in the reception. We are also joined by members of the Registry Office between 12 and 1pm to matriculate students arriving outwith the standard arrival period.

While all team members have their particular interests we work closely with each other to ensure we deliver the best service we can to our students, colleagues and other visitors. Please feel welcome to call in any time for a chat or email us on enquiry@dundee.ac.uk to learn more on how we can help you and your students.

Margaret Wyllie, Residences Officer and Enquiry Centre Manager
LIVE Smart has been designed as an online transition toolkit to be used by students before matriculation and throughout their student journey. It aims to act as a proactive support mechanism for students to help equip them with knowledge and skills to cope with life at university, bringing together a collection of resources from internal and external sources. This curated content ensures that students are directed to the best possible information to help them with a range of issues and challenges.

Students vary in their knowledge and skills, and as they go through university find themselves coping with a variety of new situations, difficulties and people. LIVE Smart aims to help them to develop new skills, an understanding of how to manage themselves and their life at university and beyond, as well as pointing them to sources of support within the University and giving practical information. LIVE Smart is divided up into 7 main sections covering: support and services; wellbeing and health; personal development; your student community; living away from home; conduct, misconduct and reporting abuse; and emergencies. LIVE Smart has many different types of resource – from videos and interactive quizzes to podcasts and links to helpful information. LIVE Smart links to LEARN Smart, the guide that signposts students to key information and resources to support them in their studies and help them develop their academic literacies.

https://libguides.dundee.ac.uk/livesmart

Joan Muszynski, Student Support Advisor

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING MAPPING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

The University’s Health and Wellbeing Steering group was set up to establish an overarching, whole-university approach to health and wellbeing, building on the mental health framework developed by Support Hub Managers, and aiming to improve mental health across the organisation, ensuring that all groups’ needs are addressed appropriately. The broad principle is to foster a caring and compassionate community within the University.

The wealth of mental health activities and initiatives already existing across the University have been mapped with a view to gaining an understanding of the principle functions and important components of these, as well as identifying any duplication, gaps and unmet need. Further work is planned to build on this approach and empower all members of the University community to regularly engage in activities and opportunities that enhance mental wellbeing.

What’s your current role?
I have just started working at the University of Dundee in a new role - Student Support Worker (Wellbeing and Sexual Violence Prevention). I am based within Student Services.

What did you do before?
For the last few years I have worked as a Project Coordinator at Scottish Women’s Aid and then as a Volunteer Coordinator at Dundee Women’s Aid. Before working at Women’s Aid, I worked in Higher Education as a Teaching Associate and an HN Degree Advisor. It’s great to return to Higher Education and also to a role where I will be able to use all the knowledge and experience I gained during my time at Women’s Aid.

What current task would you like to highlight?
I am currently looking at developing prevention initiatives including workshops and activities aimed at students, which will raise awareness of the issues relating to sexual violence and gender-based violence more broadly.

As there are two parts to my role I am also currently finding out as much information as I can about student support at the University of Dundee.

What do you see as the longer term goals of your job?
This is new role at the University of Dundee and it links to the ongoing discussions about the Equally Safe in Higher Education toolkit. I am looking forward to working with others in the university community to contribute to raising awareness of sexual violence, how it affects people, and how best to support people experiencing this. I am also looking forward to learning more about student support and supporting students with wellbeing issues.

Tell us something we wouldn’t guess about you?
While I hate cooking and find it very boring, I have spent far too many hours of my life watching other people cook as my favourite television programme is Masterchef!