Creating Healthy Communication  
Assisting dialogue and dispute solutions

Statement of Purpose

To deliver a professional and stand-alone service that works with staff as well as students to create and share good dialogue and communication habits, develop mediation skills and resolve disputes early for the benefit of our University, the wellbeing of staff and students and the wider community.

Background

Founded in 2008, our first edr Strategy was approved by the University on 8 June 2008.

Who are we?

The edr service at the University of Dundee is a groundbreaking early dispute resolution service, originally aimed at resolving staff and students disputes early and effectively using mediation. Feedback to us indicates that for those who seek our help in 80% of situations long term satisfactory solutions have been achieved. The edr service has been at the forefront of mediation within the UK and is a founder member of the national HE.FE Mediation Forum to share and extend mediation best practice throughout the HE and FE sectors. We have been contacted by other universities, nationally as well as internationally, including Hong Kong University and Goettingen University, Germany to find out more about our work.

Our team of one administrator and eight accredited and now highly experienced mediators come from a range of backgrounds across the University, led by Fiona O’Donnell, Lead Mediator.

Meet the team [http://www.dundee.ac.uk/academic/edr/accreditedmediators.htm](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/academic/edr/accreditedmediators.htm)

Our team of accredited mediators are all registered with the Scottish Mediation Network and complete regular CPD and supervision and feedback sessions as part of their continuing development. As mediators, we act on a non-commercial voluntary basis within the University. We share a common aim to promote a culture of good communication and respect and honesty and to help others create such an environment and engage with each other. We often use a co-mediation model which ensures collaborative working and gives us the ability to reflect and develop our skills. We have a strong team ethos and believe passionately in what we do.
Some quotes from persons who have used the edr service include

“Mediation provided me with a light at the end of the tunnel”
“I found a way through mediation of prevention for the future as well as cure”
“The mediators reassured me and demonstrated a high degree of skill and professionalism”

How do we help groups and individuals?

We regard edr as a continuum as illustrated below. In that way, mediation skills can be used proactively as well as actively at any time.

We help parties who are experiencing conflict to communicate and work together to resolve their differences or to establish better working practices. In doing so, we work with parties to overcome their differences and achieve a sustainable way of working together in the future. That might involve e.g. two members of staff who are not getting on, or where there is a team problem about roles and responsibilities, or where a student has been experiencing problems with their supervisor.

Importantly, we also help individuals and groups think about working with a different approach and dynamic in development meetings using mediation techniques of communication.

What have we achieved?

In the seven years since the edr service was established, we have carried out nearly 200 mediations, run bi annual awareness raising and training sessions for staff and students and been involved in numerous informal facilitated discussions. We are very proud of our success rate of 80% in resolving conflict which means that we can confidently say to people
attending mediations that they are in safe hands from experienced professionals.

From our beginnings in 2008, our edr service has grown in reputation, resulting in requests for mediation from external organisations such as Councils, Colleges, Schools, the NHS and voluntary organisations. We try to accommodate such approaches on a commercial basis, provided that we have sufficient resources to respond to internal requests, which is our primary focus.

In 2013, to mark our 5 year Anniversary, we hosted a 2 day collaborative event bringing together mediators from different disciplines across the UK and beyond, cementing our reputation as being a leader in the mediation community. This was known as a “Celebration of Differences” in Dispute Resolution and began our association with the charity PAMIS who uniquely assist the families of profoundly disabled children. Fiona is currently working with PAMIS on a government funded roll out of training across Scotland to “empower families to have constructive and meaningful dialogue with authority.”

To date, our strategic aims have been to:

- resolve disputes at an early stage and reach more satisfactory outcomes
- disseminate best practice in a modern and diverse workplace and place of study
- minimise the cost involved in disputes
- set in place mediation skills and continued professional training
- train and develop and sustain a credible, professional and high quality mediation facility at the University
- enhance management skills by using an innovative approach across the range of disciplines and staff categories in the University.

In 2014/15 as part of the collaborative relationship on edr between the Universities and Dundee and St Andrews, the LEAN team from St Andrews led the facilitation of our edr evaluation exercise.

This used the LEAN method to guide us in evaluating our progress and identifying our future direction and objectives to align with the Transformation and Excellence agenda of the University.

From that evaluation we can summarise our progress to date as follows

Most objectives outlined in our 2 strategic plans though 2008-2014 have been achieved and an annual report to the HR Committee is made on participation rates and general outcomes without identification of any participants, so the mediation process is maintained as a confidential and voluntary service. Mediation materials developed, though made readily accessible via the edr website, have been copyrighted to maintain our reputation.

- We have built on the strengths of the edr Initiative in its early years to protect and sustain a distinct professional identity for the Dundee edr model within the HE.FE Sector
• We have created a sector leading edr mediation service for staff and students with well-trained mediators and to align with the University strategy

• We have provided comprehensive CPD training for the university mediators and external delivery delivery primarily for the HE.FE sector to generate income

• We have provided training for staff and students with the edr toolkit to help others develop edr skills and now use a mediation skills framework for team developments normally up to 15-20.

• We have formed a national collaborative platform and guidance on start-up mediation schemes based on our own Dundee edr model through the formation of an HE.FE Forum

• We have built on our annual reporting structure and establish a rigorous quality assurance mechanism that enabled an impact assessment and a cost benefit analysis to be undertaken earlier this year

Development areas

Although we have developed the specification and initial 2 modules for a Post Graduate Certificate in Dispute Resolution Skills and Mediation and had this fully approved by the then School of Computing, without further resource investment, we were unable to develop this further and market. We are in consultation to pilot a Summer School for mediation skills development.

Aims for our 2015-2020 Strategy

We will be 10 years old in 2018. Before then, we will work to ensure

• a clear visibility and understanding of edr internally amongst our staff and students, within our new School structure with Deans and School Managers and with our University Court

• that our University Executive Group and Senior Management understand and value what we do. We want to support Senior Management through and post our restructuring process and enhance management skills to deal not only with conflict management but also as part of a “healthy communication approach” which embodies mediation practice and skills

• edr is a service which is a need to have rather than a nice to have for a resilient staff and student population and a forward looking University

• we continue to build on the external recognition of the service and develop this further so we continue to be regarded as leaders in our field
• we build a network of advocates within the University as a way of promoting the service and gather University-wide those who have mediation skills and qualifications

How are we going to do this?

(1) Refresh the edr strapline

We currently use the words the dialogue and dispute specialists. We want to rebrand this to say edr “creating healthy communication.” We want to retain the “edr” identity as we have a national and international identity associated with our edr patented logo.

(2) Redesign the edr landing page on the website.

We want to refocus the message on the main landing page to target individuals who do not know about our unique edr service, or who are thinking about mediation. We want to reach our beyond our existing target audiences of HR Officers, Union officials, Senior Managers to engage with the groups and structures following the 2015 restructure.

Now that we also have a greater understanding of what barriers might be stopping people engaging with edr we will use this insight to reframe our message that we are proactive as well as reactive to help conflict situations.

The service has also evolved and the website should reflect this. The majority of the landing page provides news information. More will be devoted to information on healthy communication and mediation, with links to news in a smaller section.

Insights we have gained:

• Core to our impartiality is where we sit in the University. We want to clarify that we are a cross sector across the University, independent from HR and School Management
• We want to allay any fears by staff or students that using the service would involve records being kept about a dispute, and we will make clear no records are kept or passed on
• The new web site will explain that the service is more than formal mediation, and also involves development meetings, team mediations, informal counselling, and workshops to upskill an individual’s ability to handle workplace conflict
The main focus will be the landing page, as the biography section works well.

Possible new copy for the landing page is in the attached appendix.

We will streamline the news/events and developments sections of the landing page because there is an element of duplication here and work with External Relations for their expertise in doing this.

In addition to the box contained in the appendix that we will have the following other boxes on the landing page:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News</th>
<th>Practitioners section</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Links</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with Baldragon School</td>
<td>Dates of practitioners group</td>
<td>Resilience documents</td>
<td>Scottish Mediation Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with Palmis</td>
<td>Dates of HE/FE forum</td>
<td>Mediation quiz</td>
<td>5 Year Anniversary page</td>
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(3) **Draft a new edr brochure**

On the website we have very good flyer which explains the mediation process and a guidance note. Feedback is this has been found helpful and is used at introductory meetings. We will consider what else we need to “sell who we are and what we do”.

We would like to publish a brochure which explains where the service is now, who the people are, and the fact that edr has been at the forefront of mediation throughout the UK and beyond.

It would be akin to the kind of document that external organisations would use to showcase and sell their service.

(4) **Posters around the University**

These will use our new strapline below and explain that we have an 80% success rate. We
only need a few words.

**edr Service: Creating Healthy Communication**

Did you know that our groundbreaking edr mediation service is available for both students and staff who are experiencing conflict within the University?

If you are experiencing conflict or dealing with a dispute where you need help please contact Fiona O’Donnell or visit our website to find out more information.

With an 80% success rate with our mediation service, why not give us a try?

[with our webpage link]

(5) **Refreshing the edr message with people and groups who make referrals**

Once we have the new landing page and brochure we will arrange a suite of networking events with those which refer to us:

- School Managers
- HR Officers
- Deans
- Counselling Services,
- Disability Services,
- DUSA
- Campus Unions

(6) **We will set up an internal lunch and learn sessions with Senior Managers**

- explaining what *edr* and our *edr* Continuum can do for the University
- focusing on how we can enhance management skills following organisational change through training and as sounding board for advice – e.g. are mediation mentors needed and where?
- explaining the return on investment of having *edr*: using the different measurements from our 2015 evaluation exercise to demonstrate how we have saved the organisation time and money through reducing the conflict – looking at both tangible and intangible benefits.
- as part of these sessions we will redefine how we demonstrate the value of the work that the *edr* service carries out
(7) We will increase our profile with Schools and those within Schools who can act as advocates for change for us.

(8) We will work with External Relations and UoD.IT to deliver this message in innovative and effective ways.
   - We will showcase our community work - e.g. with Baldragon School, and PAMIS – and have news section on website and also stories for social media.
   - We will highlight our collaborative approach and work with other Universities and our leadership and development of the HE/FE Forum.
   - Through Contact or Highlighter or a edr@Dundee Blog – we will do a Q&A to gain some wider exposure.

(9) We will embrace social media and engage with students via Facebook and Twitter using the University pages to:
   - Post our news – with photos when we have our annual edr retreat or work shadowing with the University of Goettingen visit, or liaison with Baldragon (obviously with consent from everyone) and then post that and make it a news item.

We will consider how best to run a campaign regarding how conflict can be dealt with. “edr’s own conflict resolution series” – Bite Size 1,2,3 etc. We will work on this at our edr retreat in February 2016 at Dundee and Angus College.

(10) Reporting and Review
   - In providing the University with our formal reporting, we will follow up on what happens with this, who sees it and what difference does it make to the priorities of the University.

Presently institutional reporting is annually to the edr Strategy Group, bi-annually to the HR Committee, University Court and to our nominated External Assessor, Ewan Malcolm.

External recognition

(1) We will consider more article writing and aim to publish articles about the edr tea, our aspirations and our successes including e.g.
   - TES
   - Mediate.com
   - Scottish Young Lawyers Group Newsletter
   - Scottish broadsheets
   - Journal of Law Society of Scotland

(2) Awards

We will look to seeking support to promoting our unique edr service for awards such as part
of the Times Higher Education and Guardian awards

(3) External speaking opportunities

We have been asked to develop 2 workshops on building an in house mediation service and in connection with the work with PAMIS on empowering families at the Scottish Mediation Network conference with Queen Margaret University in December 2015. We will also promote our leadership work at the HE.FE Forum Conference at Preston in September 2015 when the NW England Mediation Group joins our Forum.

These aims are a collaborative effort of our edr Team from our 2015 edr Retreat at Dundee and Angus College and with special thanks to the LEAN team at St Andrews University, Ewan Malcolm our External Assessor and Val Dougan for her ideas and comms. work throughout this document.

Fiona B O'Donnell
Lead for edr@Dundee and Director of Legal

September 2015
Appendix: edr landing page:

What is the edr service?
edr is the University’s early dispute resolution service where trained mediators can help staff and students resolve conflict. We are an independent team of volunteers from across the University. We are not part of HR or any other department.

What sort of situations do you assist with?
We help parties who are experiencing conflict to communicate and work together to resolve their differences. Our aim is to get parties to overcome their differences and achieve a sustainable way of working in the future. That might involve two members of staff who are not getting on, or where there is a team problem about roles and responsibilities, or where a student has been experiencing problems with their supervisor. We also help individuals through informal coaching to help them deal with conflict.

What is mediation?
Mediation involves a third party mediator helping individuals resolve their differences in a confidential way. It is a voluntary process where the parties in dispute decide the outcome and not the mediator. The mediator’s role is to manage the process and provide positive momentum, which is particularly helpful when parties have become stuck or in a deadlock.

How do you help?
We offer a range of services. That might involve a formal mediation process with a mediators or a facilitated discussion without the confidentiality formalities. We offer a first meeting within a fortnight. If you want more information you can speak to Karen Stulka our edr Administrator or Fiona O’Donnell, Lead for our edr Team

I’ve been asked to attend a mediation but the issue is with the other person, not me. Why should I attend?
Mediation is not about judging parties who are in conflict or having difficulties communicating. No records of the mediation are kept and the issue will not appear on personnel records or student records. We are proud of the fact that we have an 80% success rate. We say to everyone that you have everything to gain from trying this process and nothing to lose. We appreciate that it takes courage to want to resolve an issue. But if you feel strongly that you don’t want to be in the same room as the other party or parties in the dispute, the whole process can take place using shuttle mediation. Everyone comes to a mediation with an equal voice, and an equal say in the outcome.