Introduction

The University of Dundee (‘the University’) and Dundee University Students’ Association (‘DUSA’) wish to build on our existing strengths in working together to further enhance the student experience at the University of Dundee. This agreement sets out our approach to partnership, as well as detailing agreed priorities for the academic year (AY) 2014-15. It also describes how all students can get involved in this activity.

This agreement does not replace other strategic documents such as the Joint Agreement on Student Representation or the Memorandum of Understanding between DUSA and the University. Rather, it has been developed to promote an understanding between students and staff about agreed enhancement-focused goals that are important to all individuals who are part of the University.

We believe that this Partnership Agreement is an important statement of our commitment to the fostering of a university community within which we all have a role and a function to perform and where we all have rights and responsibilities.

This Partnership Agreement is designed to promote the engagement of students during their period of study at the University, and they are encouraged to provide feedback on their experience whenever possible.

The University Community

The University and DUSA are proud of the contribution we make to the City of Dundee, the rest of Scotland and beyond. The University of Dundee has a central vision which is to transform lives locally and globally through the creation, sharing and application of knowledge. We wish to build on our reputation as an institution which is welcoming and accessible to all.

Our student body and its relationship with academic and support staff is central to this purpose and vision. The University and DUSA value the diversity of our student population and work to make sure everyone feels supported and a part of the community. All staff and students should interact in a way which helps create an inclusive, pleasant and welcoming environment for everyone.

What is partnership?

The terms ‘partner’ and ‘partnership’ are used in a broad sense to indicate joint working between students and staff. Partnership working is based on the values of:

- openness
- trust and honesty
- agreed shared goals and values
- robust communication and understanding between the partners.

It is not based on the legal conception of equal responsibility and liability; rather, partnership working recognises that all members in the partnership have legitimate, though sometimes different, perceptions and experiences. By working together to a common agreed purpose, steps can be taken that lead to enhancement in a way that works for all concerned. The use of the term ‘partnership’ reflects a mature relationship based on mutual respect between students and staff.
This Partnership Agreement comprises two sections. Part A sets out key concepts and principles that define student engagement and representation at the University. Part B details those annual priorities that have been agreed between the University and DUSA, which are aligned with the DUSA manifesto and University operational plans.

The University and DUSA are committed to the continual development of this Partnership Agreement which will be reviewed jointly on an annual basis.
Part A – Key Concepts and Principles that Define Student Engagement and Representation

Formal Student Representation

The University is committed to involving students in decision-making processes and ensuring that they have the best possible experience while studying with us. All students are automatically members of the Students’ Association and are members of the University. DUSA primarily exists to be an advocate for students across the University by representing their rights, needs and opinions. The University and DUSA work closely together to ensure that students are represented on all relevant University committees and are supported and trained to fulfil their roles.

Opportunities to become involved in student representation include the following:

- Standing for election as a member of the DUSA Executive (paid full-time or voluntary roles within the Association). The DUSA Executive comprises the most senior student representatives and as such attend bodies such as Court and Senate to articulate the views of the student body.
- Standing for election as the Independent Student Member of Court. The Independent Court member attends meetings of University Court, the highest governing body of the University, to ensure that the students’ opinion is heard and to hold the DUSA President to account. The Independent Court member is also a full member of the Students’ Representative Council (SRC), which ensures that there is an additional link between the views of the student body and Court.
- Standing for election as a Student Councillor. The SRC includes student representatives with responsibility for specific groups of students including first year, international and postgraduate students. They deal with any and all issues affecting students on campus, and hold both the University and DUSA to account.
- Standing for election as a School President. There is one School President representative for each academic School within the University on the SRC, in addition to the cross-cutting councillor positions that represent specific constituencies. School Presidents attend meetings with staff within their schools to provide the student voice. School Presidents liaise with Class Representatives in order to create a culture of feedback and information exchange and also share good practice with other School Presidents. The School Presidents are key to ensuring that there is an appropriate flow of information between the SRC and Schools.
- Standing for election as a Class Representative. Within each School, there are a number of students elected on an annual basis to represent the concerns or issues their class may have. Class Representatives have meetings with staff and other representatives within the School to highlight any problems, and receive training from DUSA to fulfil this role.
- Standing for election as a Halls Representative. Each University Hall of Residence elects individuals to be part of a Residents Committee charged with representing the interests of the residents to the University, Dundee Student Villages and DUSA.

Further information on student representation is provided on the Quality Framework website:

http://www.dundee.ac.uk/qf/studentengagement/studentrepresentation/
Other Forms of Student Involvement

Student involvement is not restricted to formal representative structures. All students are encouraged to become partners in shaping their learning experiences and life at the University. Opportunities include:

- Giving honest, constructive feedback by taking part in surveys, focus groups and other feedback opportunities
- Sharing opinions with class representatives, or other student representatives
- Speaking directly with lecturing staff or Personal Academic Tutor / Advisor of Studies.

A key component of this Partnership Agreement between students and staff of the University is a commitment between the University and DUSA to work together to address student feedback as required throughout the year. The University agrees to ensure that DUSA has the support required to fulfil their role, and DUSA agrees to ensure that it fulfils this role responsibly in making the student voice heard.
Part B - Partnership Themes and Associated Projects 2014-15

Introduction

Using student feedback from student surveys, such as the National Student Survey and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, the DUSA Executive Manifesto and existing initiatives, the University and DUSA have agreed to work together on the themes listed below during AY 2014-15. Oversight and monitoring of the Student Partnership Agreement will be undertaken by the SRC, the Quality Enhancement Sub Committee, and where appropriate the Student Experience Operations Committee. These groups will request progress reports as standing agenda items. Progress will be reported to the University Learning & Teaching Committee on a bi-annual basis via DUSA and the relevant University committees.

The key themes identified for AY 2014-15 are as follow:

1. Academic Support

   Assessment and Feedback

   The 2014 NSS indicated that, despite considerable progress, in some areas students remain unsatisfied with elements of assessment and feedback. The University and DUSA will continue to progress projects initiated in the previous Partnership Agreement such as the review and revision of the Assessment Policy. During this academic year we will pay particular attention to improving the approach to providing feedback given on examinations.

   Organisation and Timetabling

   Although progress was made during the last academic year, both parties agree that there is more than can be done to improve this aspect of organisation. DUSA and the University are committed to ensuring that accurate class and examination timetables are made available to students as early in the relevant semesters as possible. The University and DUSA will also seek to reduce the occurrence of timetable clashes which affect the learning experience and student choice.

   Communication

   Student representatives and the University have identified that communication of information to students is an area that requires further development. We will work together to identify where the issues lie, and work to develop solutions so our students and other stakeholders receive helpful and accurate information in accessible formats.

2. Student Support

   Employability

   Both the University and DUSA are aware that in an increasingly competitive world our graduates must be equipped with a broad range of skills and experiences by the time of graduation. The Vice-Principal for Learning & Teaching working with DUSA will take forward a review of how student extracurricular achievements such as involvement in societies, student media, sports clubs and volunteering are recorded and recognised by the University. The University will continue to foster, and where possible seek to expand, links with employers and industry representatives.
Representation

Following on from the reviews in recent years of School Presidents and Class Representatives, this year DUSA has committed to reviewing the Student Representative Council and the DUSA Executive. In recent years these two groups have gone from strength to strength but it is now time to review how these groups represent and respond to the student community. To this end, and supported by the University, a review of the positions and composition of the SRC will be carried out, and the DUSA Executive will be expanded to ensure that our representation structure remains sector leading in the area of student engagement and representation.

Student Transitions

In line with the National Quality Enhancement Theme the University and DUSA will work together to support our prospective and current students as they transition into and out of university. This will encompass ensuring that support structures are in place to help all new students succeed in their learning, achieve their potential and benefit from their experience of being part of the University of Dundee community. We will work together to ensure that employability of our graduates is a key guiding principle for curriculum development as well as being embedded in our approach to development of extracurricular activities.

Signed on behalf of the University

Signed on behalf of DUSA

Professor Pete Downes
University Principal and Vice-Chancellor
27/11/14

Mr Iain MacKinnon
DUSA President
27/11/2014