University of Dundee Student Partnership Agreement 2015

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) 2015-16. 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; and
- 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 students have the best possible experience during their period of study at the University of Dundee. 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 governing body of the University, to ensure that students’ opinions are 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. In addition to the cross-cutting councillor positions that represent specific constituencies, the SRC membership includes School President representatives from each of the nine University Schools. School Presidents contribute to the decision-making processes of School committees and other meetings with staff through being appropriately informed about the views of their School’s student body. School Presidents liaise with Academic Vice-Presidents and 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 have a key role in ensuring that there is an appropriate flow of information between the SRC and Schools.

- Standing for election (or being nominated) as a Class Representative and standing for election as an Academic Vice-President. Within each School, there are a number of students nominated or elected on an annual basis to represent the relevant class/module and subject/programme. Class Representatives are representatives for the class or module. Academic Vice-Presidents are representatives for the subject or programme and are elected from the group of class representatives. The Class Representatives and Academic Vice-Presidents have meetings with staff and
other representatives within the School to provide feedback and highlight any problems, and receive training from DUSA to fulfil their roles.

- Volunteering to be part of the Students' Forum. The Students' Forum is an informal non-elected student group that provides the University and the SRC with advice on any emerging themes that relate to areas such as the estate, the Library and Learning Centre, IT, the community and DUSA.

- Standing for election as a Student Hall 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;

- participating in internal Periodic Programme Review events and the external Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR);

- sharing opinions with School Presidents, Academic Vice-Presidents, Class Representatives, members of the Students' Forum, SRC representatives or members of the DUSA Executive; and

- speaking directly with lecturing staff, administrative staff or Advisers 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 its 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 2015-16

Introduction

Using student feedback from student surveys, such as the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), the DUSA Executive Manifesto and existing initiatives, the University and DUSA have agreed to work together on the themes listed below during AY 2015-16. Oversight and monitoring of the Student Partnership Agreement will be undertaken by the SRC and the University Learning and Teaching Committee. These groups will request progress reports as standing agenda items.

The key themes identified for AY 2015-16 are as follows:

1. Assessment and feedback

The 2015 NSS results have indicated that considerable progress is being made in addressing previous student concerns about assessment and feedback. The area of assessment and feedback remains a key priority area for DUSA and the University. We will work together to ensure the successful implementation of the revised Assessment Policy, which now includes clearer guidance on the provision of feedback on performance in examinations and also expectations about the turnaround time for marking and feedback. During this academic year we will also work together to support the further development of a structured approach to evaluating and improving assessment and feedback practices through the refinement and development of TESTA (Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment) and exploring possibilities for the creation of an ‘assessment and feedback hub’ to share and develop practice.

**Performance indicator:** Improvement in NSS scores for assessment and feedback.

2. Culture and communication

Culture and communication was identified as a priority area for the University during the recent structures review. As part of this theme, we will continue to work to improve approaches to organisation and management, including ensuring that accurate class and examination timetables are made available to students as early in the relevant semesters as possible. We will evaluate the effectiveness of the revised system for Advisers of Studies and the new Reading Lists Policy and further develop these areas if required. We will also continue to improve our approach to communication so that students and other stakeholders are provided with helpful and accurate information. Additionally, we will work together to improving approaches to closing the feedback loop so that students understand how their feedback is being acted upon.

**Performance indicators:** Improvement in NSS scores for organisation and management.

Improvement in NSS scores for the Institutional questions that relate to Advisers of Studies, reading lists and feedback from students.

Increased engagement with the University’s reading list management system.

3. Employability

The Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching working with DUSA will continue to take forward plans on how student extracurricular achievements such as involvement in societies, student media, sports clubs and volunteering are recorded and recognised by the University. The SRC, together with the Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching), will evaluate
the effectiveness of the new SRC role dedicated to employability. The University will continue to foster, and where possible seek to expand, links with employers and industry representatives.

**Performance indicators:**
- Improvement in employability statistics.
- Increased engagement with the Dundee Plus award.

4. Student representation and engagement

We will work together to enhance our approach to student representation and engagement using this Student Partnership Agreement as a positive driver of progress, encouraging students and staff to become active partners in its implementation. We will take a proactive approach to encourage more of our students to engage with representation, University decision-making, its vision and strategy, and the Student Partnership Agreement through using 'Academic Alerts', lecture 'shout-outs', road shows, workshops and the Students' Forum. We will endeavour to strengthen representation for students who are not based on the city campus. We will continue to improve training and support for student representatives as well as providing additional staff development opportunities. DUSA and the University will work together to develop a strategic approach to enhancing student engagement. All students and staff will be invited to contribute to the development of strategy in this area.

**Performance indicators:**
- Increased student engagement (nominations and votes) with DUSA elections.
- Number of hits on the DUSA 'Academic Alerts' website and the live-streaming of SRC meetings.
- Development of a draft Student Engagement Strategy.

Signed on behalf of the University

Signed on behalf of DUSA

Professor Sir Pete Downes
University Principal and Vice-Chancellor

Tim Hustler
DUSA President

Date: 21/10/2015