University of Dundee Student Partnership Agreement 2013

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) 2013-14. It also describes how all students can get involved in this activity.

This agreement does not replace other strategic documents such as the Joint Statement 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.
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.

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 2013-14

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 2013-14. Oversight and monitoring of the Student Partnership Agreement will be undertaken by the SRC, the Quality Forum, and where appropriate the Student Experience Operations Group. 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 2013-14 are as follow:

1. Academic Support

Assessment and Feedback

After considering the most recent NSS results the University and DUSA are aware that students are not satisfied with current approaches to assessment and feedback. The University Assessment Policy will be reviewed during semester 2, AY 2013-14, taking on board the DUSA-led review of the student opinion of assessment and feedback which was undertaken during AY 2012-13. It is proposed that a revised Assessment Policy is developed which will include a more detailed description about expectations on feedback, including an expectation that students should receive appropriate and informative feedback within three weeks of submission of date.

Reading Lists

The University and DUSA recognise the importance of ensuring that students are appropriately prepared for study at the University. To this end, staff and student representatives (through a short-life focus group) will consider the development of a reading lists policy, which will include consideration of guidelines for core text lists to be made available to students in good time before the beginning of a new semester.

Timetabling

DUSA and the University are committed to ensuring that the exam timetables for both the winter and summer exam diets are made available to students as early in the relevant semesters as possible. It is important that all students are given the time they need to both plan their revision, and also any personal arrangements.

2. Student Support

Student Support Environment Review.

Following on from the review which took place in June 2013 the University and DUSA are fully supportive of the recommendations that were developed by the Review Board. DUSA will support the University Secretary with the development of an action plan that will include the development of the Enquiry Centre on the former RBS site adjacent to the Students’ Union building.
Personal Academic Tutors / Advisors of Studies

It is recognised that Advisors of Studies should be an important component of pastoral provision within the University. To ensure that the current system is delivering for the needs of students the University and DUSA will work together to review School-based student support and consider options for future developments. This review will encompass all aspects of School-based support systems, identify opportunities for enhancement and consider the development of a University-wide framework for student support at the level of Schools and programmes.

The University and DUSA are committed to the continual development of this Partnership Agreement which will be reviewed jointly on an annual basis.

Professor Pete Downes
University Principal and Vice-Chancellor

Mr Iain MacKinnon
DUSA President

11/12/2013

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