THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

THE SENATE

Student Support

This report provides a summary of student support over the last year, highlighting the range of activity taking place and how student support has adapted in response to the pandemic. The Senate is invited to consider and comment on the paper.

Introduction and Context

1. The Senate has previously received reports on the provision of support and promotion of wellbeing for students. This year has presented new and different challenges to students and the approach to providing support has adapted to meet these new needs. Many of the developments to support students take place in partnership with Leeds University Union and the agreed aim is to support and enhance students’ experiences of studying at the University, especially in this very different period. The support for students is located within the context of the University’s new strategy and encompasses themes such as community, inclusivity, wellbeing, the sense of belonging, student success and the promotion of skills. It also takes account of the evolving nature of the student population, which is increasingly international and diverse.

2. The pandemic led to the need to quickly adapt support services to remote working (maintaining face to face provision where possible and safe), review the approach in order to meet the needs of students and maintain awareness of support for students and staff. The provision of support was taken up by a range of teams and services and included the coordination of new requirements such as the practical support for students self-isolating. Sector wide developments also contributed, such as the ‘Student Space’ (provided by Student Minds and commissioned by the OfS) which includes online 1-1 wellbeing support, for students. There was also strong provision of practical support, social opportunities, a telephone helpline and emotional and wellbeing support available over the Christmas 2020 period.

3. While the focus has been on addressing immediate needs of students a number of sector developments have continued and we anticipate that the University Mental Health Charter development will be reinvigorated through 2021 and this supports our continued commitment for positive student mental health and the provision of 1-1 support. There have also been a number of reports relating to disabled students such as the ‘Three Months to make a difference’ report. Also, within the last few weeks, the OfS published updated expectations relating to harassment and sexual misconduct (see below).

4. Our work continues to be informed by engagement within the sector, with Chris Warrington (Head of Student Support) currently serving on the Executive Group as a Director of AMOSSHE - the Student Services Organisation and as a trustee on the UNIPOL Board. Simon Morris (Assistant Head of Student Support (Disability Services)) attends the Disabled Students Stakeholder Group and Jane Harris (Assistant Head of Student Support (Student Counselling & Wellbeing)) serving on the Executive of HUCS - Heads of University Counselling Services – and the Programme Advisory Group for the OfS commissioned ‘Student Space’. These engagements provide invaluable insight to our work drawing in practice from across the sector. The team also engages with the Leeds Student Health and Wellbeing Partnership which brings together representatives from the higher education...
institutions in Leeds, the student unions and colleagues from the NHS and third sector organisations. This approach enables the HE sector to discuss student related matters from a city perspective and to link with local services more effectively.

**Student Support Framework**

5. Members of Senate will recall that the University’s approach to student support and wellbeing is underpinned by the Student Support Framework which enables and empowers students to engage fully with all aspects of their University lives (removing barriers as necessary), in order that they achieve their maximum potential and succeed in their studies and life after Leeds. This framework ensures effective links with related professional services for example, Residential Services and Security, and with the Student Cases team in relation to the Fitness to Study procedure. There is also close working with the LUU Help & Support team, which regularly sends thematic updates on matters raised by students.

6. The aims of the Student Support Framework are supported by the Student Experience Steering Group which reports to the Taught Student Education Board (and Graduate Board when appropriate and relevant). This ensures that support is aligned with the overall University approach to student education and, in particular, that it continues to meet the holistic academic and co-curricular needs of students.

**Student Support Management Team**

7. Following the lockdown in March 2020 when the support teams and services moved to working remotely, the Student Support Management Team (specialist support leads and faculty support leads) supported the alignment of the approach and facilitated day to day sharing of information and developments.

8. The specialist support teams in Disability Services, Student Counselling & Wellbeing and International Student Office moved quickly to adapt the support they provide to meet the needs of students this year and detailed reports from each service are included in the Annexes below. In meeting the challenges of this year, Disability Services, which has 7000 students registered with it, and Student Counselling & Wellbeing, which typically supports up to 4500 students, moved their support online (maintaining face to face support where possible and safe) and innovated to create new opportunities for support. The International Student Office team, working with teams across the University, redesigned and implemented a new international student welcome and arrival service.

**Student Information Service**

9. A key development implemented at the start of the 2020-2021 session was a new Student Information Service. This aims to address general enquiries and ensure they are directed to the most appropriate channel for response and also to provide a presence on campus to welcome and support new and returning students. The new service comprises 4 Student Information Points on campus which are located in the Ziff, Chemistry West (Disability Services), Maurice Keyworth and Worsley buildings. The physical information points are supported by a dedicated Student Information Helpline and associated email account. The service has supported over 1500 students face to face and dealt with just under 7000 phone calls and emails.

**Loan laptops**

10. The move to online learning and remote provision of student education highlighted a need for some students to be supported in accessing IT equipment, typically laptops, but also some need for associated services, e.g. internet access. Using the Student Support network
across the Student Education Service a new process was quickly established in order to provide students (all cohorts) and PGRs with loan laptops. Information for colleagues is on the SES Website. The initial focus was on the provision of equipment to those with particular characteristics or in certain groups (e.g. students on the Plus Programme, estranged students, care leavers etc.); finalists were also prioritised. 110 devices were loaned between March-July 2020 and a further 423 have been loaned this academic year. The focus now is on continued support for students in light of their feedback via the JISC Digital Student Experience Survey.

**Hardship Funding**

11. The University’s hardship funding comprises the Leeds Hardship Fund, the International Leeds Hardship Fund accessed via the University and a new Emergency Hardship Fund available through LUU Help & Support. The fund has been adapted and expanded (through significant University investment and funding from the OfS) to meet the new and unexpected needs of students and PGRs such as accessing learning, private accommodation costs etc. This also included additional funding generously donated by the University’s alumni community raising £220K for the student support fund (which has supported hardship funding, including emergency funding via LUU) and a separate dedicated fund of £135K to support medical and healthcare students who joined the NHS workforce to support the pandemic response.

12. In 2020-2021, the Leeds Hardship Fund and International Hardship fund have, to date, allocated just under £100K while the Emergency Hardship Fund has awarded £75K. The NHS Workforce fund has provided £60K directly to students and provided for additional specialist support to be appointed in the Student Counselling and Wellbeing Team (see below in Annex C). Work continues to promote the availability of hardship funding to students, address new and emerging needs and target groups of students.

**Communications**

13. A key part of promoting positive wellbeing for students is to provide information and engaging communications using a range of channels and in a variety of formats. This includes embedding support information in key developments, such as the Welcome, Induction and Transition resource and ensuring that LUU are up to date. A regular student newsletter provides support information for students to address the changing needs this year, such as relating to financial hardship. The PGR community also regularly receives a Doctoral College newsletter which includes targeted opportunities such as the ‘Dr Who’ series of workshops run by the Student Counselling & Wellbeing Team.

14. Alongside direct communications to students, colleagues are provided with information about the wide range of wellbeing events and activities which take place each week in order that they are promoted locally. Using the Student Support Management Team and including a range of colleagues from professional services e.g. Residential Services, information for teams is circulated, for use in local communication channels to inform a wide range of colleagues. These opportunities are also circulated to GP Practices in Leeds via the ‘Student Locality’ managed by our partners at Leeds Student Medical Practice.

**Academic Personal Tutoring**

15. An important aspect of our support for students is carried out by the academic community in the form of Academic Personal Tutoring. The current focus on Academic Personal Tutoring, led by Professor Lightfoot with input from a range of colleagues, has given greater prominence to the role and established the lead tutor role along with the creation of resources to support colleagues. The Academic Personal Tutor is a key point where support
needs can be identified and discussed (e.g. in relation to pastoral support needs, or the provision of IT equipment) and tutors are regularly provided with support information to include in emails to their tutees. The development of learning analytics will also provide an important resource to proactively support students.

Harassment and Sexual Misconduct

16. Senate will be aware of the ways in which the University is already actively addressing harassment and sexual misconduct, both through prevention and supporting the reporting and resolution of incidents that do occur. This approach builds on the LUU led campaign ‘Draw the Line’ which seeks to raise awareness of the issue. We already have in place:

- A clear statement of, and policy on, the expectations regarding professional boundaries with associated training for all staff.
- Training for ‘first responders’ to disclosures of sexual harassment (over 300 staff trained).
- The provision of an online reporting mechanism for staff and students, and associated follow-up process, to report harassment, hate crime and online bullying.
- An established approach to addressing cases which involve members of staff, including a number of trained investigators.
- Information via webpages (student facing, staff facing, HR, LUU, EPU, Student Cases).
- The provision of support for students and staff affected by cases of sexual harassment.

17. There is a continued strategic focus on developing our approach, however, to maintain and promote a positive culture, enabling change where needed, and embed the provision of additional specialist support. There is also work ongoing in partnership with LUU and the current Welfare Officer to ensure that policy and procedures are transparently articulated to students and PGRs and further development of education and preventative measures.

Chaplaincy

18. The Chaplaincy is an important and longstanding part of our University community and plays a key part in our framework for support. As with all of the support services, the Chaplaincy has adapted its provision to ensure a continuity of service over the last year. The Chaplaincy serves our University as well as Leeds Beckett University and Leeds Arts University which helps bring together our student communities across the city.

Conclusion

19. Senate is invited to review and comment on the details in this paper. The commitment to supporting students rests with the whole University community, across the academic teams and professional services through engagement as well as the provision of general and specialist support. Our approach to meet students’ needs combines the proactive engagement of students, in order to empower and enable the achievement of successful outcomes, with the ongoing review and development of our specialist services.

C Warrington
Head of Student Support
Annex A

International Student Office

1. The lockdown in March 2020 was preceded by successful delivery of the 2019 International Welcome Services (Summer, September and January); presentation of the Mary Morris gift-funded Global Community Enhancement Programme phase 2 draft framework to embed phase 1 developments and embark on new approaches to transform international and intercultural experience at Leeds; and an SES-led International Student Experience review in February 2020. This recommended priority areas for action including: communications with international students, consistency and ownership of international student arrival and welcome experience; Intercultural capabilities for students and staff; and current capacity and future demand.

2. From March to July 2020 International Student Office Global Community Team worked with colleagues across the institution in the Welcome Induction and Transition and Sense of Belonging workstreams to enable learning and resources from the Global Community Enhancement Programme and International Welcome Services to be used within these projects and in the development of training for the Student Information Service. Further development of the Global Community Enhancement Programme has been paused this year to enable focus on support for students during the pandemic, but this is due to be restarted this spring.

3. A key objective in responding to the pandemic was to completely redesign the international welcome support, which had previously been delivered predominantly face-to-face during very defined periods of time, to meet the new needs of international students in this context and to align this support to the welcome, induction and transition provision being developed for all students. The new service development and delivery has been achieved through a partnership between International Student Office Global Community Team, University Conference and Catering Teams, and International Office and their Link to Leeds student ambassadors.

4. Welcome services this year needed at the same time to support students starting programmes remotely outside the UK; help students prepare to come to the UK and support their arrival whenever they were able to travel according to their individual circumstances; and support students to settle into a new country in a restricted campus environment once in Leeds.

5. By 23 January 2021, 3152 students had registered for International Arrival services which have been operating constantly from September 2020 to date including throughout the Christmas period. These feature a dedicated arrivals helpdesk, free transport from Manchester and Leeds Bradford Airports, pre-booked self-isolation food box (complimentary) and kitchen/bedding/toiletries packs delivered to University and private-sector accommodation. By 23 January, 2135 students had been collected from the airports and 2289 food boxes delivered. Services have continued to be provided to students arriving since January.

6. Provision of welcome and orientation information was moved online with expanded pre-arrival web content which has required constant updating in line with changing government guidance; and online international orientation and regular interactive online ‘Welcome to our Global Community’ sessions for students to use when starting programmes whether remotely or in Leeds. Between November 2020 when the interactive sessions started and January 2021, 380 students attended welcome sessions and these continue weekly.
7. Link to Leeds student ambassadors have been providing online peer support including arrival welfare checks, live chat 10am – 10pm, and welcome social activities ensuring that new students can easily contact more experienced peers. 80 welcome social events were hosted by 23 January 2021.

8. The new International Welcome services have been very well-received with the Arrival survey in January 2021 finding that 92% of students were satisfied or very satisfied with their arrival experience. Narrative comments highlight the value and emotional significance the arrival services hold for many students, for example "I felt safe and comfortable after long trip. People who took us from the airport were so kind and helpful. I am so satisfied with this service, and the food box I found at my apartment helped me to self-isolation. This was all what I need when I arrived to Leeds, and I honestly felt I am in my home. I do not know how to thank you for this, and I told my family and friends about this amazing experience. Thanks million!"

9. Students have appreciated online orientation and welcome social provision in the current circumstances, but some students express that they miss face-to-face activities to help them meet others and get to know campus and the city. Students understand why these have not been offered this year, but it will be important to bring these activities back into the welcome offer when possible.

10. The programme of Global Community co-curricular activities which are normally offered to support students all year round to make friends and build a sense of belonging had to be reduced after the lockdown in March. A livestreamed online Intercultural Ambassadors showcase ran very successfully. Other Global Community activities were paused until late 2020 when a Global Community TEAMs area was developed to connect international and UK students. Global Café was relaunched online in this TEAM and other online social activities created which formed part of the activities programme offered over the Christmas vacation and are now run weekly hosted by student ambassadors. The Writing Back programme linking international students to local older residents as pen pals is due to restart this spring. Decisions on developing digital delivery of other activities or waiting until face-to-face can be resumed will be made over the coming months.

11. A new workshop for international students on Managing Wellbeing through Change was developed in partnership with Student Counselling and Wellbeing which has been delivered to groups of various study levels at different points in the year. Several intercultural training and networking sessions were also delivered to students and staff this year, including intercultural induction workshops run by Student Success Officers and training for 100 Accommodation Office and Residence staff.

12. Located within the International Student Office Global Community team, the Muslim Student Adviser working alongside the Chaplaincy has continued to meet the high demand for 1:1 support for Muslim students, initially offering phone and online and now online, phone and in person appointments. She has also worked closely with Health and Safety Services to enable prayer space to be provided and when possible, Friday prayers to resume.

13. Ensuring communications meet the support needs of international students has been another significant area of work for the International Student Office Global Community Team during the pandemic. Examples include providing regular updates for Coronavirus and pre-arrival webpages; developing communications for students related to Brexit; and new web pages on support for self-isolation. Experience gained over this critical year for student communications will be fed into future work to develop the University’s international student communications.
14. We have worked closely with LUU’s International Student Officer and the International Student Advisory Board in developing support for international students this year and to help staff to gain further understanding of the experience and perspectives of international students. This month’s Internationalising Student Experience Network workshop “Developing your intercultural and linguistic awareness” in partnership with the Language Centre will feature contributions from members of the Advisory Board.

15. International Student Office Global Community Team is currently developing plans to secure the future delivery of International Welcome services; review and restart the Global Community Enhancement Programme taking into account the new context; build back capacity to deliver a programme of face-to-face/hybrid Global Community activity when possible, including partnership activities; continue work to engage and respond to international student voices; work with Student Communications to develop the approach to targeted, inclusive international student communications; contribute to work to increase intercultural understanding/competence in the student and staff community; and support the work on current capacity and future demand.
Disability Services

1. The key priority for Disability Services in the 2019/20 academic year was to continue to build upon previously strong service development in order to meet growing demand and to support a continued emphasis on streamlining and flexibility of opportunity while strengthening collaborative cross institutional working. In 2017/18 the Service reported a growth in demand of 35% taking the total number of students engaged with the Service to 6400. This growth has continued and in 2020-2021 disability services holds records for 7769\(^1\), a further 21.3% growth. This growth has been supported by:

- Student engagement – the service has worked hard to find ways better to engage with students and raise awareness. To achieve this, contact and engagement with all areas of the University has been increased to offer support and opportunities for collaborative working, there are increased opportunities to engage via social media, the student and staff newsletters and through the Student Panel, a collaborative body made up of both staff and students who seek to guide and direct our service for the future. Pre-arrival events, which aim to ensure effective engagement with new students prior to them joining Leeds, have been further developed

- Flexible access to support – in developing the Service over the past 5 years there has been an increased focus on providing more flexible ways for students to engage with support, and enhancements to the advice and guidance offered to enable students to make informed choices regarding the level of support they want to access. This has supported students feel more empowered in being able to design a package of support that works for their individual needs, rather than the Service providing a ‘one size fits all’ approach. This has increased confidence in students feeling the service is “for them”.

- Collaboration – Disability Services has continued to engage with the wider institution and provide opportunities to share expertise, knowledge and experience in support of a holistic approach to providing support. The Service aims to continue this work and influence future development at all levels by providing insights and expertise in the field of disability support and accessibility in general.

- Development of knowledge resources – the service has promoted awareness by offering expertise to the wider University. This is carried out alongside work with students to enhance and support the overall student experience. A good example of this has been the development of the Assistive Technology Adviser role, who not only works with students on a one-to-one basis, but who has also developed a bank of resources that can be used across the institution to the benefit of all.

2. Disability Services continues to plan for an increase in the number of students who indicate a disability. In 2019-2020 the percentage of students who formally disclosed a disability to the University had risen by 1.2% to 14.4%.

3. As part of the Student Education Service, Disability Services works collaboratively to provide high quality advice and guidance. Covid-19 has of course had an impact, and it is recognised that there have been some challenges in meeting the level of demand from both students and other areas of the University within a remote working environment. This was largely related to slow systems and home working arrangements rather than processes or functions. However, the Service quickly moved to using alternative platforms and was able to offer students all of the normal services within a week of moving online, reducing any potential negative impact.

\(^1\) This number includes students who are at various stages of seeking support, or who have chosen not to formally disclose to the University.
Student Counselling and Wellbeing

1. Student Counselling and Wellbeing has continued to develop its service offer, expanding mental health, wellbeing and counselling provision, same day ‘Drop In’ appointments and a comprehensive Groups and Workshops programme. Levels of demand in 2019/20 were atypical in pattern, the impact of Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns reduced the overall numbers of students seeking support from March 2020, mirroring national trends in HE and statutory services. In 2018/19 there were 3797 registrations, in 2019/20 3116 self-referral forms were received, a reduction of 18%. A further 492 students accessed same day ‘Drop-In’ appointments, run in partnership with LUU. As a result, waiting times have been easier to manage at peak points of term, the majority of students could access an appointment within 3 weeks and the longest wait for a routine appointment was 6 weeks.

2. In response to the rapid shift to home working all appointments and group sessions were offered remotely, either online or by telephone, transition supported by our existing online provision. All staff completed additional training in online support and counselling, with additional, monthly, clinical input from the Online Therapy Institute from April 2020 to present. Student engagement with remote/online provision has been excellent, with a marked reduction in appointment non-attendance and short-notice cancellations during lockdown.

3. The clinical risk profiles of students seeking support continues to increase in both complexity and severity. Both the percentage and total number of students disclosing self-injurious behaviour (14%), suicidal ideation, prior suicide attempt (11%) and current plans to take their life (3%) remain of concern. In 2019/20 21% of students completing a self-referral form (645) were allocated to a priority appointment based on clinical or academic risk or significant recent trauma.

4. Pre-Covid 2019/20 the same day Drop-In service which runs in partnership with Leeds University Union operated 1-4pm Monday to Friday, staffed by the SCW practitioner team in the foyer of the Union building. The focus of this service is same-day, early-intervention support, information and signposting. This provision was increased to all-day, Monday-Friday, from September 2020, to ensure daily accessibility, with a hybrid of on-campus and remote on-line provision. Uptake has been 45% of available appointments, with 87% attending remotely, 13% in person.

5. The Groups and Workshops programme moved online from April 2020, with twice weekly meditation and mindful relaxation sessions, a Mindful Resilience Course, ‘Build Your Wellbeing Toolbox’ four-week course and weekly Webinars such as:

- Tackling Procrastination;
- Self-care & Wellbeing;
- Perfect or Good Enough?;
- Self-compassion
- ABC of Managing Anxiety

Bespoke sessions were developed for International Students, Medicine and Healthcare NHS placement students and those in University Residences to address issues such as isolation. Uptake has exceeded expectations, a recent Tackling Procrastination session attracted 145 registrations, and over 100 attendees.

6. Supporting academic, pastoral, administrative and front-line staff across the University remains a strategic priority for Student Counselling and Wellbeing, and a named practitioner is available during service opening hours to provide information, guidance and support for
staff who may be concerned about a student’s welfare, including a mechanism to indicate students where a priority appointment is indicated. In its third year of operation the Clinical Consultation and Guidance Duty Service continued to receive high levels of enquiries, with family members raising concerns the largest area of work.

7. A new Medicine and Healthcare NHS Workforce, Enhanced Support Pathway has been established. Supported by Alumni funds, this project was agreed in May 2020, in response to the additional challenges facing students entering the NHS workforce to join the Covid pandemic response. Bespoke online sessions, such as “Self-care for Caring Professionals”, prioritized appointment access, an increased counselling contract offer and specialist trauma therapy, are among the support available. Eighty medicine and healthcare students have accessed enhanced support to date.

8. Equality and Inclusion Focus: Service Development Priority 2021/21. A dedicated work strand began in summer 2020, reviewing service accessibility, particularly in relation to BAME student and PGR experience. An SES funded Student Internship Action Research project is underway, in partnership with LUU, focusing on BAME student and PGR perceptions and experiences of support services, to ensure student voices are represented in support service development.

9. The digital online wellbeing service Togetherall, previously Big White Wall, shows steady student engagement, with 1927 registered users in 2019/20 spending an average of 40 minutes on the site. The majority of usage has been during evenings and weekends. The service is particularly valuable for students on placement, studying abroad or outside of term time, and for those not yet able to speak in person about their difficulties.

10. Work towards promoting a whole locality approach to student mental health through external partnerships continues. NHS services continue to operate through a termly Student Mental Wellbeing Sessions (now online), and a direct referral pathway established. Jane Harris sits on the Leeds Mental Health Partnership Board and the associated Mental Health Strategy Group for the city, alongside the Real Time Suicide Surveillance Group and Leeds Strategic Suicide Prevention Group, increasing the visibility and profile of student mental health across the city this year. The Leeds Mental Health Strategy for 2020-25 has three priorities, one of which is to **improve children and young people’s mental health**.

11. Planning for 2021/21 is underway, with reference to ongoing national research into the impact of Covid on adult, and young adult, mental health. Projects such as the UK Covid-19 Mental & Wellbeing Study, demonstrate that the mental health of young adults and women in particular have been disproportionately, negatively, effected by Covid, with a worrying commensurate increase in suicidal ideation. Collaboration with the School of Psychology will ensure planning for next academic session is evidence based and we continue to provide flexible and effective counselling, mental health and wellbeing services.

12. One of the greatest challenges remains a lack of accessible referral and signposting routes into NHS and voluntary sector services due to a lack of capacity and external service waiting times. At the time of writing, March 2021, the majority of counselling, therapy and mental health services are largely inaccessible to students due to long wait times that do not align with the academic annual cycle and/or closed waiting lists.

- **Leeds Mental Wellbeing Service** (formerly IAPT; NHS psychological therapy): 3 weeks wait for initial telephone screening assessment; 6-8 weeks wait for Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner ‘step 2’ intervention; 8-9 month wait for Step 3 CBT.
- **Community Mental Health Team**: Initial assessment KPI 2 weeks; further appointments, 1-3 months.
- **Market Place** (counselling for young people): Open, 1-4 weeks for ‘Fast Access’ support (max 4 sessions), 3-6 months wait for individual counselling.
- **Leeds Women’s Counselling and Therapy Service**: counselling, 3-6 months.
Leeds Mind: closed to new referrals.
Leeds Personality Disorder Managed Clinical Network: 12 months wait.
Support after Rape and Sexual Violence Leeds: closed to new counselling referrals.

13. There are a number of areas for development for the Student Counselling & Wellbeing service in 2020/21, including:

- CRM database to be introduced in 2021 to improve student experience, data management and administration efficiencies.
- Review of response to 3rd party disclosures of concern for student wellbeing with associated consideration of ‘assertive outreach’ role within Counselling and Wellbeing.
- Building/premises review – any further increases in staff cannot be accommodated in existing premises and current activity is limited by space constraints e.g. size of face-to-face groups and workshops on campus.