Introduction

The Student Partnership Agreement, SPA, outlines the areas that Aberdeen University Students’ Association (AUSA) and University of Aberdeen (UoA) have agreed to prioritise and work together on over the period 2018 – 2020 to enhance the Student Experience.

This document identifies the agreed priorities for the 2019-20 academic year. We have changed the presentation of the 2019/20 document following feedback on the 2018/19 one. The identified priorities have been informed by both AUSA and UoA strategies, student feedback, Sabbatical Officer manifestos and work previously undertaken to enhance the Aberdeen student experience. The agreement reflects our joint commitment to agreed shared goals and principles:

- fostering an environment for open and ongoing dialogue between students and staff, and
- embedding transparency and honesty throughout
- recognising and being respectful of different approaches to ensuring the best Aberdeen student experience

Priority 1 - Communication and Engagement

We will continue to streamline and improve our communication with students. Last year we agreed joint communication principals and adopted some new working practises to improve how we deliver messages and information to students. Through InForm and Pulse Survey the University and AUSA will continue to develop mechanisms for proactively obtaining and responding to student feedback.

To meet the needs of our diverse and disparate student community we will continue to tailor the approaches used to communicate. Through the University and AUSA communication policies, we will provide clear guidance to all internal stakeholders to ensure the right messages are being communicated at the right time and in the right way to students.

We are aware that the engagement of minority ethnic groups in activities and events is generally poor and will work to address this, particularly in sport and will continue to support and promote a range of non-academic engagement opportunities for students.

Students tell us that they have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on their course (Q23 of the NSS, 90%). What is working less effectively is the closing of feedback loops (Q25: It is clear how students’ feedback on the course has been acted on (58%). There is also a need to raise the profile of AUSA, strengthening the understanding of the vital role that AUSA plays in representing students’ academic interests through the course rep system, the Student Conveners for each School and the AUSA team of sabbatical officers and staff (Q26: The students’ union (association or guild) effectively represents students’ academic interests (47%)).

We believe that addressing these issues will require a collective effort by staff and students working together to ensure effective closing of feedback loops. We will also work together to raise the profile – amongst both staff and students – of the vital work of AUSA in driving improvements to the academic as well as wider experience of students.

Performance Indicators

- Number of staff and students engaging with InForm;
- Number of students engaging with the Pulse Survey;
- Increased student and staff awareness of AUSA;
- Increase in the number of students from minority groups participating in sports clubs;
- Increased engagement from students with Course Evaluation system;
- Improvement in NSS results under Student Voice (especially Q25 and Q26).
Priority 2 - Sustainability

In an era of significant societal challenges, an effective approach to sustainability and social responsibility ensures that resources are used efficiently. We recognise that activities conducted in a way that minimises negative environmental impact while demonstrating an awareness of ethical and social responsibilities must be a shared priority. We will work together to encourage student food sharing initiatives and reduce energy use, waste, particularly food waste and landfill tonnage and to promote sustainable travel.

Performance Indicators

- Decrease in disposable cup usage in all campus outlets;
- Reduction in energy use in designated buildings on campus (Hillhead, University offices);
- Reduction in food waste in all campus outlets (including supporting the student food sharing initiatives);
- Improved use and availability of appropriate waste bins; including food waste bins, dry recycling bins and bins for events;
- Increase in usage and awareness of bike storage facilities across all campus sites;
- Increase in appropriate bike racks and storage facilities across all campus sites (particularly flexible bike racks).

Priority 3 - Accessibility, Inclusion and Wellbeing

The University and AUSA are committed to creating an inclusive culture which celebrates the diversity of the University’s staff and students. We have a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of sexual violence and harassment and last year we launched Report Support. We will continue to work together to promote safe and welcoming campuses for our community.

Student Health and Wellbeing is a strategic priority for both the University and AUSA. Last year the University introduced Mental Health Mentors to provide students with ongoing support for their mental health conditions. We continue to roll out Scotland’s Mental Health First Aid training, with over 200 staff being trained since the start of the last SPA. The University Counselling service has moved to a single session therapy model from July 2019, which aims to meet students’ needs quicker and more effectively. We will continue to monitor this to ensure effectiveness. We have secured a place as a pilot institution, working with Rape Crisis and ESHE, to roll out a tiered staff training approach for GBV and Sexual Harassment and Violence in the coming Academic Year. We will continue to work with students to combat drugs and substance abuse.

We will continue to work together to raise awareness and understanding and seek to gather feedback on the impact of this approach.

Performance Indicators

- Number of reports received via Report Support;
- Number of students supported through Report Support;
- Increase in student engagements with organised programmes;
- Number of students engaging with the issues of violence, consent and harassment through campaigns, training and comprehensive induction processes;
- Number of students engaging with campaigns to combat drugs and substance abuse;
- Number of staff, including personal tutors, trained in mental health, GBV awareness and student support;
- Level of student satisfaction with counselling service and waiting times following the introduction of the OAAT model in the UCS.
Priority 4 - Student Living

Student life is much more than getting an academic education. We are committed to providing facilities and infrastructure conducive to supporting our students in all they do. The campus development programme is ongoing. Last year saw the redevelopment of the ground floor of the Union building to provide AUSA with a home, the upgrading of induction loop system and introduction of new bookable study pods for students.

We will continue to provide a broad range of opportunities for students to engage with social and co-curricular activities by working to understand and meet the needs of students on all our campuses, including specific segments such as PG’s, commuting students, carers etc.

Performance Indicators

- Development of timely engagement programme and services to support postgraduate and commuting students;
- Increased availability of and engagement with services offered at Foresterhill;
- Increased awareness of bookable study and social spaces;
- Increased usage of bookable study and social spaces;
- Increased availability of safe student social spaces;
- Increased awareness of available study space;
- The number of student members of Groups, societies, sports clubs.

Priority 5 - Careers and Employability

We understand that students need more than strong academic qualifications to achieve their potential throughout their time at University and after graduation. We value the importance students place on their employability and work toward ensuring that we provide a range of activities and programmes which enhance their career prospects. We aim to help students explore their career potential, enabling them to make informed career choices, build up important skills, competences, capacities, and graduate attributes.

We will work together to support and improve the range of, and levels of engagement in, co-curricular programmes.

The Careers Service’s increased focus on employer engagement activities this year aims to increase the number of opportunities students can connect with throughout their time at University. AUSA continues to offer a variety of volunteering options, with more of them gaining enhanced transcript recognition.

Performance Indicators

- Increased levels of awareness across the range of careers and employability services and programmes.
- Increased levels of student interaction with the CareerConnect site;
- Number of students satisfied with the services offered by the Careers Service;
- Number of students participating in enhanced transcript recognised activities;
- Number of students engaging with the AUSA volunteering portal.

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