The University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh University Students Association joint Peer Support Partnership Project:

The Enhancing Student Support project aims to ensure that, over the next decade and beyond, students have access to a framework of guidance and support that builds on the best of current practices, meets contemporary needs, and is of a quality and consistency appropriate to a university of high global standing. Improvements have been phased in from academic year 2012/13 and will be delivered over the next three years.

As part of the Enhancing Student Support project the University and Edinburgh University Students’ Association (EUSA) are collaborating to deliver a joint Peer Support Partnership Project. The Project seeks to develop peer support opportunities for students across the 22 academic Schools within the University. Peer Support involves enabling students with more experience to share their knowledge, skills, abilities and expertise with new or less experienced students. This is a reciprocal relationship, based on mutual respect and understanding and is usually goal-focused and time-limited. A range of schemes are being developed, covering Peer Assisted Learning, Befriending, Mentoring, Academic Families, the House System and much more.

**Values and Principles underpinning Peer Support**

1. Supplemental Instruction (SI) and Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS), Supervisor Training, November 2012, National UK Centre for PASS, Teaching and Learning Support Office, The University of Manchester
Foster a sense of belonging within the student body
Enhance the student experience and engage students as change agents
Support students to develop strong inter-personal, communication and professional skills
Recognise everyone has the power to pass on knowledge, skills and experiences that would benefit others
Provide an opportunity for Schools/academics to receive ‘real-time’ feedback from students on multiple aspects of their student experience
Engage students as active and autonomous learners with a vested interest in their University experience.
Encourage the forming of an intellectual community of learners, where students can exchange and discuss academic theories and ideas
Create a social space where students can ask about course choices, common pitfalls or even the best places to go out
Allow senior students to grow in confidence and maturity as they facilitate the learning and positive experience of junior year students.
Quality assured comprehensive, interactive, practical training for Peer Support Leaders
Small group/ one to one collaborative rather than competitive learning
Peer Support benefits all students regardless of academic performance

Dove-tailing with the following University Strategic Priorities:

- Academic Performance
- Student Experience
- Feedback
- Transition
- Employability
- Personalised and Autonomous Learning
- Student Engagement
- Global connections

Work to date

- Research and analysis of existing models of Peer Support, both within the institution, nationally and internationally, identifying key features of success and areas of development in enhancing the student experience.
- Consultation with students and staff in every School across the University, exploring their ideas, motivations and needs and examining how we deliver on these goals.
- Phase One Peer Support Report published which identified key elements of success in Peer Support, common challenges, varying models and set out an action plan going forward.
- Pilot Projects established together with students and staff: Physics, Mathematics, Veterinary Medicine, Geology, Nursing, Economics and Accommodation Services (Fast Track).
- Peer Support Working Group has brought together practitioners from across the University and EUSA to exchange ideas and identify areas for development going forward.
- Successful Benchmarking Event: Sharing best practice in Peer Support within the University and nationally, working in partnership with the University of Manchester.
- Through continued motivation, support, supervision and training by EUSA in partnership with the Schools and Central Services there are now over 40 Peer Support Projects running across the University.
- Following their inception, ownership and operation of the schemes is retained by students and staff in the Schools, although EUSA provides ongoing support.
• Every School now has or is planning to have a Peer Support Project in place for at least one year group by Sept 2013, with many going above and beyond this minimum standard.
• We are working with the University’s Institute for Academic Development to examine issues around monitoring and evaluation of peer support systems, ensuring quality from the outset.

Evidence of Success:

Those Schools who have allocated staff time, resources and budget to the Peer Support Partnership Project have a hugely increased rate of student satisfaction in this area. When surveyed there was a 79% positive reaction to the statement ‘There are sufficient Peer Support Opportunities available to me’, in the Schools where there is a well-resourced peer support projects. Successful partnership models of Peer Support that have had a positive impact on the student experience can be viewed here:

BioPALS: http://biologypals.weebly.com/


Quotes from those involved:

“I was in a position last year where a Peer Supporter would have been helpful, so my experience last year has fuelled my desire to be there for others: no one should be alone.” Peer Support Leader

“The experience of this weekend has been enriching and I have learnt a lot about effective communication. More importantly, I have learnt a lot more about myself and how I react to certain situations. The context of the training was highly relevant and (it was) definitely beneficial to have heard feedback on my communication skills’. Peer Support Leader

‘The experience helps me academically and provides support’. Recipient Student
‘The Peer Support Project owes its success so far to the development of relationships and collaborative working between EUSA, university staff and students. Students have jumped at the opportunity to be involved and shape the support they can both offer and receive, and together with University colleagues we are transforming student engagement and creating a real sense of community within the institution’. Acting Director (Representation, Student Support and Activities, Edinburgh University Students Association)

"EUSA have been very supportive and helpful to our Student Support Team as we implemented our Peer Support system" Senior Tutor, Vet School, University Of Edinburgh

**Performance Outcomes:**

Many of the new Peer Support Projects are tied into the Edinburgh Award, this is a wraparound award that recognises the co-curricular work that students put in during their time at University. Through training, support and reflection it helps students maximise the benefits from their University experience in terms of personal and professional development. Please see: [http://www.employability.ed.ac.uk/Student/EdinburghAward/](http://www.employability.ed.ac.uk/Student/EdinburghAward/)

**Toolkit:**

Working in partnership with the University we have created a Peer Support Toolkit; A menu of all the research, resources, training, policies, guidelines and evaluation documentation needed to establish a successful Peer Support Project. Enabling Schools to identify a model(s), which best suits the needs of their students and providing practical guidance as to how to take these forward. Please see: [http://edin.ac/13P5RsD](http://edin.ac/13P5RsD)

**Next Steps:**

Going forward with the Project we hope the partnership will continue to flourish and each College will be allocated a EUSA staff member to support Project design, implementation, publicity, recruitment, induction, training, supervision and debriefs. They will work jointly with the University Staff and Students giving advice and guidance on every aspect of the Project, identifying and sharing innovative practice from across the Schools and together developing a University-wide mechanism to capture the real-time feedback produced from the Peer Support Sessions.

We also hope together with the University to continue to support and develop consultation mechanisms to ensure students are recognised as partners in the Peer Support process, finding new and creative pathways and informing policy, practice and direction of the Projects.