

T20/21 Student Experience

School/ Directorate

Student Services

Person Responsible

Lorraine Anderson

Created

19th August, 2020

Last Review

19th August, 2020

Status

Complete

Next Review

4th December, 2020

Screening Data

What is the name/title of the policy/activity?

T20/21 Student Experience Work stream

Describe the aim, objective and intended consequences of the policy/activity.

The aim of the work is to ensure that returning and future students have a positive experience of the University of Dundee in the light of the Covid 19 restrictions. This work is broad and includes ensuring that accommodation, arrival, matriculation, funding, employment support, accessibility, induction, graduation and dignity are inclusive of all students and their needs.

The intended consequences are that students will be able to study successfully at Dundee, whether remotely or on campus, that the experience will be a positive one and that students will succeed in their studies and be able to take their place in the world of work.

Who is responsible for the policy/activity and who implements it?

The T20/21 Project is being led by the Vice Principle of Education, with the Director of Student Services leading on the Student Experience work stream. The implementation of the work that this work stream entails will be delivered in the main by Student Services, in collaboration with other areas of the University, such as Estates and Campus, Library and Learning Centre, IT Services, External Relations (Recruitment), individual Schools and DUSA

Who is effected by this policy?

In the main the work affects all returning and future students , but also is relevant to those making enquiries about study at Dundee and those recently graduated, who seek employment support. It also impacts on all staff involved in the various aspects of the work, having to change the way in which each of the services and support mechanisms are provided.

Is there any indication that this policy is relevant to equality and the protected characteristics or that those with any of the protected characteristics will have a different experience in relation to the intended outcomes of the policy?

There is a potential greater relevance to race, sex , age and disability. This is mainly linked to the restrictions and increased risk of Covid 19. Other issues include socio economic impact and digital poverty. Although this is not directly linked to the protected characteristics, there is evidence that many with disabilities, single parents and minority ethnic groups are disproportionately caught in the poverty trap.

Other concerns relating to race are the potential for increased racial abuse, linked to the origins of Covid 19. Student Services have supported two students over the summer period who were being racially abused by members of the public, about Covid 19. The potential for on line harassment is also a concern, with the high use of social media amongst students and is seen widely in the national and international press.

It is relevant to equality, in so far as the student body and potential students are diverse and may be engaging with the University for the first time. A significant number of returning and new students are international students and due to restriction related to Covid 19, will be unable to travel to the campus. Information from those affected by Covid 19 to date show that men from minority ethnic groups appear to be at greater risk of infection than white men and women. In addition students and staff with certain disabilities, particularly relating to autoimmune, respiratory and diabetic related illness are at greater risk of infection and may be required to shield and therefore unable to return to campus. For any student caring for children or a family member, restrictions around childcare facilities, home teaching, shielding and general wellbeing, is likely to have a disproportionate impact on women, because of their traditional role as the main carer in families.

Although younger people appear to be less significantly affected by Covid 19 generally, where larger gatherings such as that resulting from arrival on campus, have occurred, there has been an increase in infection amongst young people. This has driven a wider increase across the UK throughout September.

The impact of self isolation and remote work may impact on mental health, something which Student Services are already alert to and have made counselling available for.

Throughout the Covid 19 period, Student Services have been open to all students and applicants and in particular the counselling services have maintained an online presence, which has been widely used and successful.

Recommend this EA for Full Analysis?

Yes

Comments

The Student Experience is affected by relevant to equality because of the diverse nature of the student body and the risk areas related to Covid 19. In relation to age, larger gatherings of young people have been shown to increase the spread of the disease. This is likely to have wide implications for the student body, particularly those travelling to campus and taking up shared accommodation. This has been seen widely across the UK with the opening up of Universities and colleges.

Around 4% of our current student body have disclosed a disability and some of those will be required to shield. There are likely to be many other students who have not disclosed their disability, who may also require to shield. In addition there will be students who have a caring role or live with an individual who themselves are at higher risk of Covid 19. In addition, increasing risk of mental health related illness is being seen as a result of the changing approach to learning and at times, self isolation. Mental health issues amongst students has been on the rise year on year across the country and Covid 19 has increased the overall use of counselling services.

In relation to race, around 4000 of our student body are from Europe and beyond. Due to the nature of the disease and the variety of steps being taken to restrict travel, a number of those students will be unable to travel to Dundee. In addition, individuals from black and Asian communities have been shown to be at greater risk of the disease and this will no doubt lead to anxiety amongst our international, European and UK based students from those communities. Matters relating to access to systems to be able to participate in the various on line 'on boarding' and welcoming activities is also likely to affect international students more. Cultural and political restrictions may also affect some of our international students. One area of concern is the impact on Chinese students of the national and international media around Covid 19 and the potential that has to increase the risk of harassment.

In relation to sex, the implications of caring responsibilities are exacerbated by the lack of caring support, whether child care or caring for a family member. Women are still the primary carer in most households and so this is likely to have a disproportionate impact on women. This is likely to affect their ability to come to campus and also to impact on their ability to successfully study alongside their caring role, meaning significantly greater overall workload.

For all other students there will be an impact on not being able to experience the engagement with staff and other students fully, as a direct result of restrictions and there is a potential for impact on the general health and wellbeing of all. In addition there may be implications for the learning outcomes of students where wide engagement restricts dialogue and discussion.

Rate this EA

High

Impact Assessment Data

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Age?

- Yes

The majority of the student body are between the ages of 17 and 24. Although this groups is less at risk of Covid 19, this group will have a different experience of University this coming two semesters and beyond. This may well impact on their overall wellbeing. However, although this age group is generally at lower risk of Covid 19, emerging evidence has shown that increased gatherings of young people has contributed significantly to the rapid, increased spread of the disease. The restrictions being placed on students in accommodation, teaching space and across campus, to limit those risks will result in a different overall student experience across all aspects of their time at the University. The shared experience for young people who have missed out on their final months of school and the first semester of university may have longer term implications on young people, their confidence and learning outcomes in spite of the efforts being made to ameliorate that.

Mitigation - Student Services have worked hard in partnership with External Relations to provide clear messaging about what students will have available to them and the restrictions in place and why. There has been a strong network of support, responding to student questions and there is a robust mechanism for identifying and reporting any symptoms of Covid 19 amongst both staff and students on campus. This will continue to be the case for the foreseeable future

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Disability?

- Yes

Covid 19 has shown to be a greater risk to those with underlying health conditions, particularly those linked to respiratory and autoimmune system function. Around 4% of students have disclosed a disability, although not all of these will pose additional risk from Covid 19. There is likely to be a greater number, however many will either not wish to disclose the disability or will not see their condition as relevant. Some disabilities will require students to isolate or screen and this may impact their ability to return to campus. It also has implications for existing students who should be going on placements but are unable to do so. Mental health related issues have been increasing year on year in the student population and Covid, and the restrictions, including self isolation, may exacerbate anxiety and mental health related illness.

Mitigation - Student Serviced and in particular Disability Services have been supporting existing students and re-assuring new students throughout the lockdown and Covid period, providing support for disabilities and reasonable adjustments, whether returning to campus or otherwise. The counselling service has remained in place throughout Covid and has been well used, irrespective of its move to online.

Access to equipment to support students who require specialist equipment or adjustments has been provided, including overseas students who cannot travel to campus. In terms of the learning environment, Disability Services has been involved with providing advice and guidance to IT, Learning and Teaching leads and Library Services to ensure that accessibility is taken account of in relation to the materials, including advice and information and teaching materials. Ongoing challenges around teaching materials and accessibility are being addressed with advice and guidance for staff and students.

Accommodation and on campus facilities have taken accessibility for disability needs into account, when preparing for return.

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Gender Reassignment?

- Yes

There are no implications directly linked to Gender Reassignment, however, University is often the place that individuals take their initial steps to re-assign their gender or transition in terms of their own identity. The inability to travel to campus may affect an individuals decision to transition and as a consequence may also impact on an individuals wellbeing generally. On campus, the University is committed to Gender Reassignment and Trans Inclusion and that is reflected in the Dignity at Work and Study Policy and its membership of Stonewall.

Mitigation - re-assuring all students of the University commitment to equality and having a robust support mechanism in place for any student unable to attend campus and struggling with challenges to their well being and study. In addition, on campus there is a Trans Inclusion Policy in development and that will be promoted widely to support any staff or student member wishing to reassign their gender.

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Marriage and Civil Partnership?

- No

The student experience is unlikely to have any implications on the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Pregnancy and Maternity?

- Yes

For those students who can manage onto campus, there will be limited access to facilities and this includes external child support services. Whilst the University Nursery is open, and available to staff and students, places are limited and childcare limitations may impact on an individual's ability to come to campus and experience the campus. The restrictions in place on campus also impact on the ability to have visitors and that would include childcare.

Mitigation - . The university nursery is open and available, however this will only support those on campus with a space. It is important that University pregnancy and maternity policies continue to be promoted for students as well as staff and this includes the criteria for mitigation and no detriment policies. This needs to apply to those working remotely to try and take account of the very different culture and restrictions under which they are working.

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Race?

- yes

The arrival at the University usually commences with a welcome week that includes the opportunity to meet with staff and other students. This is important for all students, however the Covid pandemic has had a significant impact on the ability of our international and European students to travel to campus. The implications of this include the challenges of home study for some, accessibility to systems and platforms and the lack of opportunity to learn in open discussion and dialogue with other students from around the world. The limited time for on line face to face interaction can limit the ability to clarify and fully understand content and context.

Issues around culture and the potential for impact on student of Chinese origin or background from harassment as a result of the world media reporting of Covid 19 is also a concern. During the summer period, Chinese students in Dundee experienced anti Chinese sentiment from members of the Dundee public, due to the spread of Covid 19. Those students were provided support through Student Services at the time.

Mitigation - although restrictions on travel are out with the remit of the University, Student Services have continued to provide up to date information for students on matters ranging from matriculation, on line welcome, study, financial restraints and general health and well being. The move to online welcome and induction is part of that. In addition, all support services through Student Services, including disability support and counselling services, have remained available online throughout the Covid period .

Hardship funding has been extended to include international students, to overcome and challenges with having the necessary digital equipment to study effectively and this has been invaluable.

Regular contact with their advisors of studies is being encouraged through the student and staff bodies, to ensure there are opportunities to discuss any issues or challenges the individual student may be experiencing English for International Students and the International College, Dundee has continued to provide language support throughout, to help support those with language needs.

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Religion and Belief?

- No

There is no evidence of a link between the Student Experience work and religion and belief.

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Sex?

- Yes

The implications for sex is based on the fact that the main caring responsibilities for children and relatives remains with women. In addition, cultural implications may mean that women students are restricted by the expectation of their contribution to the running of the home in some situations and this would have the effect of reducing their access to the remote 'on boarding' or welcome, as well as the learning experiences. The collegiate experience of being on campus, supports all students to be confident to discuss, challenge and be challenged, which is lost to some extent by the blended approach. This also has cultural implications related to sex, where women are less likely to be encouraged to participate in such debate.

Evidence has shown that there has been a drop in the academic submissions from women over the Covid 19 period and this has been linked to increased overall workload

Evidence has shown an increase in domestic abuse during the Covid lock down period, with women the main victims in cases.

Mitigation - The University nursery has opened and is running, mitigation and no detriment policies include recognition of the role of caring, whether for children or family member. The flexible style of blended learning, including synchronous and asynchronous teaching, allows students to study some of their modules at a time suitable to them. In the University, the Equally Safe working group has an established route for reporting and supporting the well being

of staff and students affected by gender based violence. The promotion of that support has continued throughout, as has the availability of counselling services to support those who find the increased workload due to caring and other responsibilities challenging.

The University has encouraged individuals to do what they can and raise with their line managers or their advisers of studies the challenges they face and to have these recorded for any future need for no detriment or mitigation to be applied.

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Sexual Orientation?

- Yes

Similar to the situation with gender re-assignment, many young people find that University provides them with the right environment to be open about their sexuality. This is supported by University associations, networks and policies. Restricting that environment may impact on their decision to be open and on their confidence in their self identity.

Mitigation - re-assuring all students of the University commitment to equality and having a robust support mechanism in place for any student unable to attend campus and struggling with challenges to their well being and study. The University continues to promote its membership of Stonewall and to provide information through the Live Smart, Learn Smart and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion sites information on sexual orientation and the support available to staff and students. The Dignity at Work and Study Policy supports LGBTQ+ staff and students.

Taking account of the findings so far, is there a possibility that the implementation of this policy would result in a different experience or a detriment for those with protected characteristics?

- Yes

The work to maintain a positive student experience for all students, although comprehensive, cannot address the limitations placed on students through external factors such as travel restrictions, cultural barriers and restrictions to caring support.

Travel restrictions prevent students coming to campus and that has implications for the collegiate experience of being amongst other students and also the ability of some to move away from the cultural barriers they experience in their home environment. That fact alone has implications on age, disability, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, sex and sexual orientation.

For those able to travel to campus, the experience is limited and the evidence from other Universities shows that the gathering of students increases the risk of Covid 19 in younger people, an age group that has previously been unaffected by the virus, which in turn may result in increased anxiety.

Those arrangements that have been made for welcome and induction have been widely welcomed and overall the experience has been a positive one, in spite of the restrictions, over which the University has no control.

Based on your findings so far, what recommendations or changes (if any) would you make in relation to the policy and how it is implemented?

The steps that have been taken to ensure that students have a positive experience have been welcomed. Whilst understanding that the restrictions place greater barriers for some, the University has been limited in the steps it can take.

That said, the work to provide information and support should continue as is, whilst acknowledging the gaps in the experience of those who cannot be on campus. It is important that the monitoring and feedback from students and staff is gathered in order that policies and activities, such as no detriment and mitigation, can be amended where necessary and gaps can be identified.

1. Student feedback to be captured through ongoing pulse surveys, on their overall experience of the current semester and the blended learning style.
2. Support being sought should include, where possible, information on whether that may be related to any of the protected characteristics where possible.

The reasons for these recommendations are that this experience is unprecedented and the University should be willing to learn where they could have approached matters differently. That said, there is nothing at this stage, to clearly indicate any failure on the University's part in trying to make this difficult time as positive as possible for its students.

Where you have recommended actions/changes to the policy, what are the timescales for completion of these

31-01-2021

What monitoring arrangements do you have in place to identify changes in any impact or relevance?

1. Gather data on student matriculation and returning students to see where there are shortfalls.
2. Follow up with any student leaving mid course on what the reason for that is. Note should be taken where a protected characteristic is related to this.

3. Capturing ongoing feedback from students through pulse surveys and
4. Gathering any details in increased reporting of health and wellbeing issues related to protected characteristics and student experience.

Comments

The Student Experience will be radically different in the current and forthcoming semesters due to the restrictions imposed as a result of Covid 19. While the University has taken many steps to present students with a positive experience, there is likely to be a greater impact for some students, particularly those who cannot, for many reasons, be on campus. This includes those with a disability that places the individual at greater risk, those who have caring responsibilities, in many cases women, those restricted from travelling to campus for national and geographical reasons and those who are affected by cultural challenges relating to remaining at home.

These circumstances are unprecedented and it is incumbent on the University, alongside the positive steps it has taken to encourage inclusion of all its students, to monitor the feedback from students and continue to encourage students to provide feedback and seek support where needed.

Pulse surveys have started and should continue through the initial three months of the blended learning approach and Student Services should be alert to increases in requests for support from student, using that information to identify where they may have gaps and improve on the overall experience of the student.

Organisation Sign-off Data

Having read the EIA, do you approve its findings and recommendations?

- Yes

What are your reasons for approving/not approving the EIA?

The points raised are valid and the monitoring arrangements fit with the project.

If you have approved the EIA, do you agree with the monitoring arrangements in place?

- Yes

The work being undertaken in supporting a unique situation. The monitoring arrangements fit with a model that is about continual assessment of the project to identify gaps.

Where you have not approved the monitoring process, what other steps do you require to be taken?

No applicable

Comments

The COVID-19 pandemic impacts adversely on student and staff wellbeing and has been shown to have a greater impact on groups such as women, carers, BAME people and those with disabilities. Where possible arrangements have been made to provide additional and inclusive support to all but with particular emphasis on the above groups by keeping services open online and where possible in person and also ensuring childcare is available through the Nursery when permitted. The EIA is approved but will be reviewed regularly and when new measures are announced if appropriate.

Next Review Date

2020-12-04

Outstanding Actions

No outstanding actions