



# Assuring the Quality of Student Support Services

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# Objectives of the workshop

- To share experiences of quality assurance of student support services.
- To identify examples of good practice.
- To gather feedback on the University of Edinburgh's proposed method for the monitoring and review of student support services.



# What are 'Student Support Services'?

- No consistent agreement
- All academics, the students' association and many other 'front line' staff are providing support to students.
- Support as a 'descriptor' for activities (learner support, study skills support)
- Two distinct groups of support services (Prebble et al 2004):
  - Those focusing on students' personal, social and emotional needs
  - Those focusing on students' academic needs.
- Support as a 'service' or 'function' (a service industry)
- Organisation of support
  - HEIs organise student support in different ways



# Conceptions of student support

- The deficit model:
  - Students in need of support.
  - Deficient or vulnerable groups (disempowered).
- The business model:
  - Student as customer (empowered)
  - Student support as a 'service industry' (Sewart 1993)
- Learning from the 'deficit' model to enhance the student experience for all students 'business model'
- Positioning and agency of the student is changed
  - From 'support' to 'supportive' (Jacklin and Le Riche 2009)
- Partnership models akin to other aspects of student engagement
- Change in relationship between HEIs and students



# Why is it important?

- Changing higher education context and culture of support
- Increased inclusion, widening participation
- Increasing globalisation
- Rising costs of higher education
- Increasing marketisation and commodification
- Increasing consumer culture
- Convergence of curriculum processes (tutoring) and support services (e.g. Careers and Disability)
  - no longer seen as a “bolt-on”.



# Increasing need for quality assurance

- Shift away from a focus on purely the learning and teaching experience
- Increased emphasis on the 'total student experience'
- Increasing diversity in student populations increases range and need for support
- Recognition of the need to monitor effectiveness of student support
- Increasing demands on support services
- Budget cuts – prompting concerns that quality of provision will deteriorate



# External drivers

- National (UK) and International surveys including an emphasis on student support.
- **National Student Survey (NSS)**
  - Academic support, learning resources, personal development
- **Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)**
  - Learning resources, skills and personal development, career and professional development
- **Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)**
  - Skills development, infrastructure
- **International Student Barometer (ISB)**
  - Support services



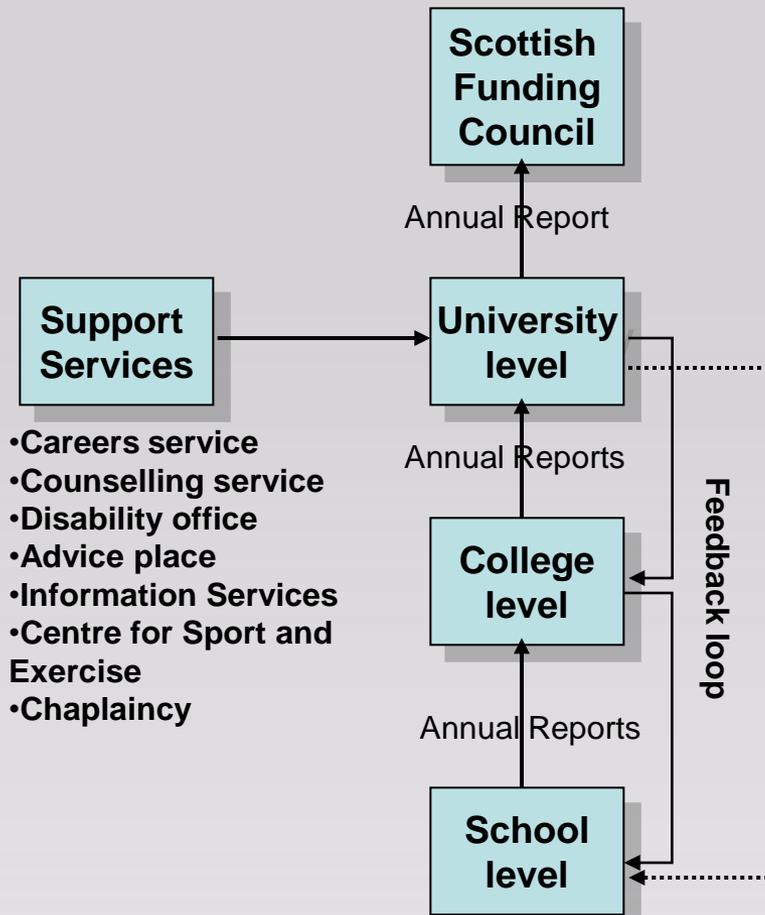
# Student support at Edinburgh

- **Registry**
  - Student administration services, scholarships and student finance, appeals
- **Corporate services**
  - Accommodation Services, Centre for Sport and Exercise, Finance Office (fee collection)
- **Information services**
  - Information skills, library, computer services, multimedia team, e-learning, audio-visual technology
- **Student and Academic Services Group**
  - Edinburgh University Students' Association (Advice Place), Counselling Service, Disability Office, Careers Service, International Office
- **Colleges and Schools**
  - Academic and pastoral support



# Current QA of support services

## Key responsibilities



### Senatus Quality Assurance Committee

- Does not directly conduct QA of courses or programmes.
- Reviews Colleges' Annual QA Reports.
- Ensures processes are being followed and actions taken.
- Identifies key trends of concern to the wider University
- Reviews Support Services' Annual Reports.
- Reports annually to the Scottish Funding Council on the outcomes of internal reviews and external accreditation reviews

### College Quality Assurance Committees

- Review Schools' Annual QA Reports.
- Check progress against last Annual Report.
- Review reports and progress against periodic internal subject reviews (TPRs/PPRs).
- Identify key trends at the College level
- Report to SQAC.

### Schools'/Teaching Organisations' Quality Committees

Provide School overview of:

- Student performance on courses/programmes and trends
- Feedback from students
- Feedback from External Examiners
- External accreditation reviews
- Internal subject reviews



# Inclusion in teaching reviews

- Inclusion of student support in internal subject reviews
- Teaching Programme Reviews (undergraduate programmes)
- Postgraduate Programme Reviews (postgraduate taught and research programmes)
- Management of the student learning experience:
  - Pastoral and academic support
  - The learning environment (including library and IT and the physical environment)
  - Graduate attributes, skills development and professional development, careers



# Objectives of the 'Task Group'

- Assess the effectiveness of our current approach in relation to key external reference points
- Identify which centrally provided support services should be reviewed
- Identify a review cycle that allows for the strategic and operational role to be monitored and reviewed
- Consider processes for sharing good practice
- Consider the nature and scope of guidance to review areas and reviewers
- Recommend a timeline for implementation



# Deciding 'what to review'

- Considerable discussion over what should be included in the list
- Some support services have a greater impact on the student (learning) experience
- Focus on those that are 'student facing'
- Focus on those that have a significant impact on the student (learning) experience (but may not be student facing)



# Assessing the impact on the learning experience

- 3 main functions of support (Tait 2000):
- Cognitive
  - supporting learning
- Affective
  - ensuring a supportive environment
- Systemic
  - ensuring effective administration systems



# Categorisation of support services

- Cognitive
  - Careers service, Information Services, Library, Disability Office, Advice Place
- Affective
  - Counselling Service, Chaplaincy, Advice Place, Accommodation, Centre for Sport and Exercise
- Systemic
  - Registry
  - Finance
  - Recruitment and Admissions



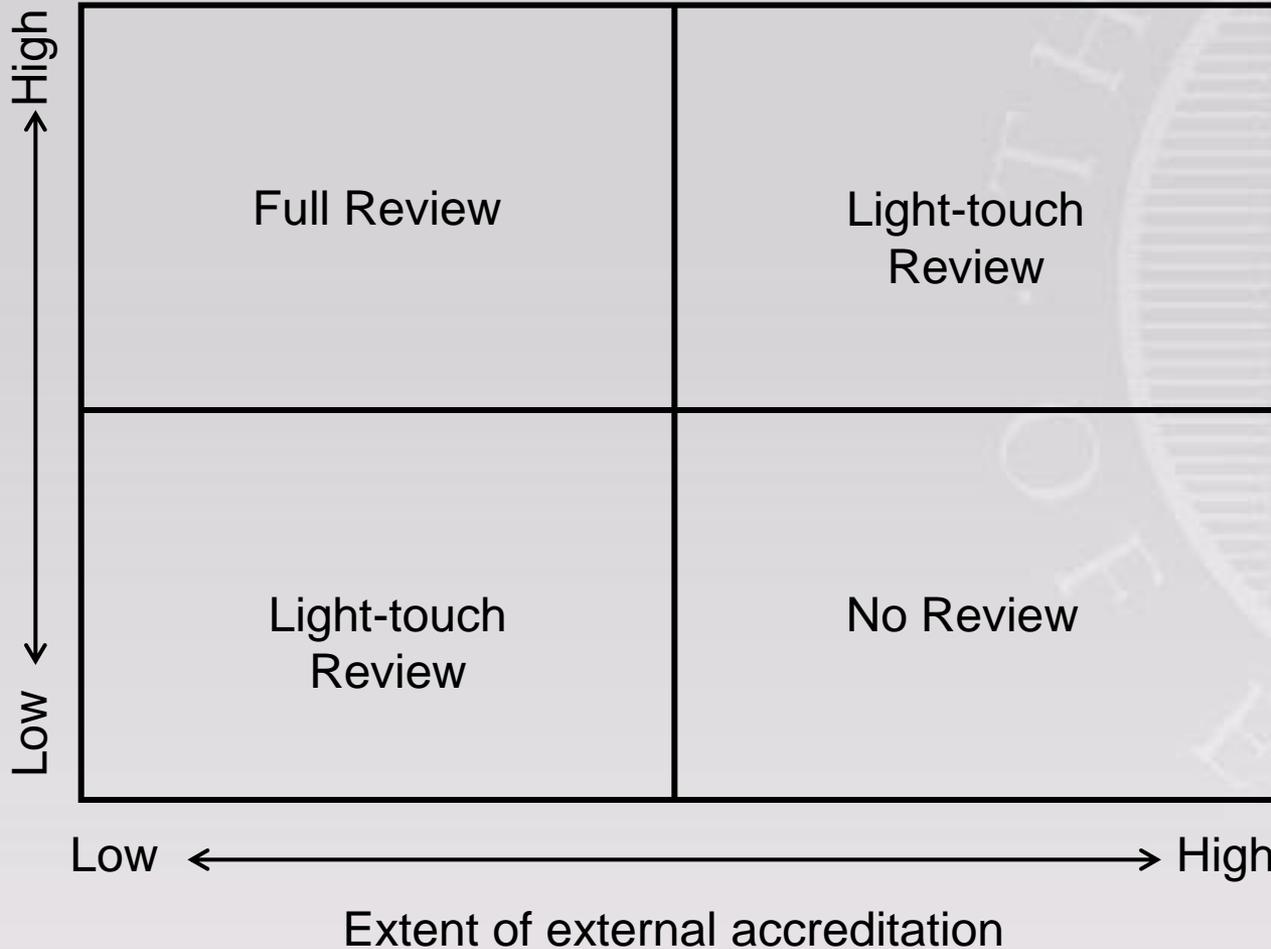
# Deciding 'how to review'

- Discussions around the scope of the review
- The role of annual monitoring
- The role and necessity of periodic review
- Recognise the role of other reviews (such as external accreditation reviews)
- Support services with greater impact on the student learning experience should be reviewed more extensively



# Matrix of Reviews

Impact on the student learning experience





# Proposed types of review

- **No review**
  - No separate internal review. External accreditation review reports used.
- **Light-touch review**
  - Annual monitoring, No periodic review conducted as these are covered by external accreditation processes
  - Periodic review an option where annual monitoring signals concerns
- **Full review**
  - Annual monitoring and periodic internal review every 5 years
- **Thematic reviews**
  - Responsive to issues/themes as they arise.
  - Involving clusters of support services
  - Themes may be PG support, international students, support for collaborative provision
  - Can be included as part of annual monitoring or as a separate periodic review process.



# Deciding 'how to share good practice'

- Current process does not allow for an overview of issues and themes arising from reviews.
- Separate review group involving representatives of support services
- Identification of themes arising from reviews (in the same way as for teaching reviews)
- Feedback into support service review process **and** teaching review process
- Include support services in sharing good practice events (Inspiring Teaching Conference)



# Discussion Questions

- Which support services do (or should) institutions monitor and review, and why?
- What mechanisms are (or should be) used to monitor and review support services
  - how effective are they (or might they be) in enabling the support service to reflect on its contribution to the ‘quality culture’ within the institution?



# Discussion Questions

- How do (or should) the support services engage with students to monitor and improve the quality of services?
  - To what extent are (should be) users and non-users included?
- What are (or should be) the demarcations/interactions with other types of reviews? (Internal and external/academic or other support service)