



University of Edinburgh case study

1. Short outline of the university.

The University of Edinburgh was founded by Royal Charter granted by James VI in 1582 and funded by the Town Council as 'The Tounis College'. As such, it was the first civic university in Britain and also one of its oldest. Although distinctly Scottish in character, the University was internationalist in outlook from the outset, with students coming from across the globe. By the 18th century, it was a leading centre of the European Enlightenment. Today, with over 20,000 students, 3,600 from an international background and about 120 nationalities, Edinburgh University has a very cosmopolitan and diverse student population. The University of Edinburgh offers first, second and third level degrees in a very wide range of subjects, with strong capacity in the professions. In 2004-5, student enrolment was 16,930 (undergraduate, first degree), 5,433 (postgraduate) and a population of 12,125 students in lifelong learning and professional development taking a range of short courses. The University's internal structure consists of three Colleges (Humanities and Social Science, Medicine and Veterinary Medicine and Science and Engineering) with 21 Schools (formed from the previous c130 departments), and three Support Groups (Information Services, Corporate Services and Academic Affairs, Planning & Secretariat). All academic activities (teaching and research) are the responsibility of the Schools, but support services are either the sole responsibility of a central service (Finance, Library) or are delivered by a combination of School and central services (IT, student support, e-learning).

The University of Edinburgh has a commitment to Internationalisation and seeks to 'maintain and enhance its position as a world class international university, stressing the benefits this brings both to the whole university community and to the Scottish nation' (Strategic Plan 2003-2007). The University is keen to see the number of opportunities for overseas students to increase (from current baseline by 50% by 2007/8). Reciprocal numbers are required to make the system work as the university pays for outgoing students and so needs the income from the incoming students to make the arrangement 'balance'.

There is also wish to see an increase in 'voluntary' mobility in which students from other universities visit Edinburgh or local students visit other universities, not as a compulsory part of their course but out of personal interest, or to learn a language. This is seen as desirable as part of the globalisation trend and as a way for students to get wider international experience.

The Strategic Plan Objectives include:

- Promoting student exchanges between Edinburgh and overseas HEI's, to the benefit of the individual students and the community as a whole
- Providing a high quality experience for overseas students attending Edinburgh
- Maintaining and enhancing our overseas student numbers

The Plan also states that the University has an ongoing strategy to

- provide the necessary support mechanisms to overseas students attending the University by ensuring that the provision and functions of services such as admissions, accommodation, induction and study skills, and the University's major welfare and support services, are integrated and developed to the benefit of the students.

Future plans include considering ways to improve support structures for international students, with a specific planning target of re-investing the additional income generated from non-EU international students into the University's infrastructure to ensure the necessary support mechanisms are provided for these students.

2. Exchange students incoming:

- Erasmus / non-Erasmus. 350/150 (06/07)
- 241 female, 109 male
- Average age 22 years
- the current cohort (06/07) 78% are in College of Humanities and Social Science, 2% in Medicine and Vet Medicine and 20% in College of Science and Engineering.
- Mainly at Bachelor level, with an occasional Master level.

3. Exchange students outgoing

- Erasmus / non-Erasmus, 250/150, (06/07) although this varies year to year
note : some universities count per student (who may only come for a term)
- 170 female, 77 male
- Average age 21 years
- Most study Humanities & Social Sciences subjects
- In 06/07 three were studying veterinary medicine and 21 science & engineering subjects
- There were two PhD students (06/07)

4. How the university organizes its services.

At the University of Edinburgh, Erasmus and other visiting students are classified as 'non-graduating', but still receive the standard student card (digital photo, name, student number, card end date, magnetic strip on back). Where possible this card along with the login/password for the student portal and email are sent to students in advance of their arrival in their information packs. Where this cannot be done due to time limitations, it is available for them to collect on arrival. There is rarely a delay, and such arises either because the student or their home university has not notified Edinburgh of their intention to visit or of the date they expect to arrive. Most visiting students receive their information before arrival. The card entitles them entry or access to the following centrally-provided services and facilities:

Library

Access to library buildings when open; borrowing of long and short term loan items; use of PCs in libraries; support and advice – personal, online, printed; ability to search local and remote databases and catalogues, and to request items from them on payment of appropriate fees; use of photocopiers; access to very wide range of e-journals under library subscription (>6000 currently); use of loan laptops in Library;

e-learning

access to central e-learning systems through a single sign-on mechanism ("EASE") via the student portal; the main university VLE is WebCT Vista (except in Medicine/Vet Medicine where a different in-house system called EeMEC/EeVEC is used); online assessments; e-portfolio;

computing

email via central student systems; access to university microcomputer labs (~1000 PCs); use of printing services (pay per page); access to university wireless network; option to use VPN access when off-campus; access to in-person, online and printed documentation for support and help; advice and limited technical assistance with own PC; antivirus software + updates; low-cost software purchase under UK educational licences; use of assistive technologies if needed; a virtual community website and discussion area specifically for international students hosted by the International Office (VIC);

management of teaching quality

visiting students are treated exactly like local students, receive the same degree of academic and pastoral support, and the same quality of teaching; at this time no materials are translated into other languages other than publicity materials or non-English language teaching materials; visiting students are able to become members of course staff-student liaison committees, and of the School and College liaison committees; visiting students cannot become officers of the student union (EUSA); their views of the teaching on their courses are gathered alongside those of local students, but most courses do not have a way of identifying the views of visiting students separately, and thus do not know if they have specific views; the International Office does gather views of visiting and returning students, as do individual Schools and Directors of Studies (academic and personal advisor, every student is assigned to one), and in general a reasonably comprehensive picture of their overall experience is known;

There are no distinctions made between local and visiting students, and all have the same access to the central university services as needed.

However, the University is quite devolved with respect to academic services and so each School decides what other services and support to provide, and of course does all the teaching of students. In the area of e-learning this means that some systems and resources are provided locally by Schools or even by individual members of academic staff, and thus are not necessarily provided equally well to all students. To our knowledge, if there are variations, these are minor and small in number. In terms of academic support, visiting students often do get special attention to enable them to make the most of their short time in Edinburgh, and the International Office provides this help centrally.

At the present time we have no arrangements to enable visiting students (or staff) to access their home university systems directly through the University of Edinburgh systems, except where this has been put in place by Schools. As far as we can tell, such collaborations are only done for research purposes.

When visiting students leave, their access to Edinburgh physical and digital facilities ceases after a 4 week timed delay, and so if they had not copied files or email from our servers these would be lost to them (in reality they are not deleted and could be recovered on request) and they are not able to access WebCT etc or the library databases (local or remote through Edinburgh licences).

Local students who visit another university for one semester or one year retain their Edinburgh student card, and so are able to use the physical facilities whilst in Edinburgh, and can access the digital facilities from a distance if they are able to make the connections. There is in reality rather little help with this but we are working on a community provision that will contain all such guidance plus the experiences of past students.

5. University policy / strategy / actions to support incoming and outgoing exchange students, especially vis a vis ICT or digital information resources (induction, multilingualism, etc) and gathering views of quality of educational experiences.

The University of Edinburgh takes its support for visiting students as seriously as it does its support for local students, and the International Office is a key central services agency in this respect. One of the key performance indicators in this respect is the number of visiting students who decide to return home earlier than expected ('drop-out'), and the present situation regarding this is that only a very small number of students withdraw during the course. This is similar to the figure for outgoing students. Drop outs occur mainly before they actually arrive.

The International Office student website will link visiting students to the Virtual International Community site, which is an information resource with a message board and lists of

international groups. Visiting students can view video clips of students' experiences and get advice about language skills and societies to join. Some ethnic groups form communities based around this VIC site, and organise events. The IO also organises welcoming evenings at which visiting students are able to meet senior staff of the University and each other.

The Erasmus programme is subject-based, and so is arranged at School level, with a member of staff as the link contact and an agreed process. However, the International Office has more negotiating powers than the Schools and is required to sign off all exchange contracts, including Erasmus. It is working to increase the number of visit opportunities for students and is actively promoting exchange, for example through an International Fair which is organised at the start of the academic year.

The very local nature of the Erasmus and other visiting student experience, based in Schools, makes a description of the services and support offered quite difficult. There is however, a widespread assumption of reasonable competence in written and spoken English, which is a requirement for graduating students, and so no central services offer language variants of support materials. Some Schools may offer these if particularly large numbers of international students are recruited, but generally these would be graduating, and post-graduate/continuing professional development students rather than visiting/Erasmus students.

The very complex nature of the Erasmus programme (170 universities, many times that number of Schools, Faculties and Departments and exchange coordination staff within them) means that coordination, communication and assignment of responsibility is difficult. The International Office in Edinburgh considers that this is an area in which more ICT could be introduced as a central system or tool. Standardisation of information for all Erasmus (and other exchange) students so that all are given access to common basic information about the university they intend to visit could also be done via a central website system. Finally, there is evidence that despite the efforts of International Offices in European universities, visiting students tend to mix with each other more than with local students, that is a degree of self-segregation exists, and so perhaps some kind of local 'buddy' system might be established using email, chat, SMS etc to provide support and contact prior to, during and following visits.