



# INSIGHT

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## **“Psychological” profile of an academic year**

University of Dundee



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# 'Psychological' profile of an academic year

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## Executive summary

There are two dimensions to the provision of the student support, the range of services provided and the timing of the provision of these services. The first dimension is more dependent on the level of resources available while the second dimension is more connected to the effectiveness of the student support departments. Both are important to be addressed if the student support is to be improved. Yet, in the current economic climate, resources are ever so limited, hence the efficiency of their use and the effectiveness of the student support departments in doing so has an increased importance.

The 'Psychological' profile of an academic year' project aimed to shed more light on what demand for support appears in each of the months of the academic year and how is this matched by the sometime overstretched student support services. The limited resources for the project meant that only first year students were surveyed. The project tested the questions whether the demand for support services has an inherited dynamics throughout the academic year and, if so, whether the student support services can do more to reflect this in the way they provide their services to increase their effectiveness. The results from the project show that the answer to both questions is 'Yes'.

There is a clear pattern of demand for student support throughout the academic year. Furthermore, the level of this demand is not entirely dominated by the academic challenges

that students are faced with but also by the state of their mental health and the challenges in their wellbeing.

Based on the findings of the project several important recommendations are made. Firstly, there is a clear need for rebalancing the provision of student support toward more proactive way of delivering it that reflects the peaks of the main particular issues that affect student experience.

Secondly, there is a clear need for rebalancing the provision of student support from one more based on helping the student to one that is based on supporting the student, again reflecting the peaks in the particular issues that students face during the academic year. Student support practitioners need to brave up and trust the student that they can succeed by just being supported and that they can learn more from this than from receiving help.

Thirdly, student support departments can increase their effectiveness by focusing their efforts toward reducing the magnitude of the peaks of the main issues that students face, thus engaging in more prevention activities than crisis management work.

Finally, fourthly, student support departments can better address the cycle of the demand for support by students by placing the student at the centre of the support system. This can only happen if support departments learn to co-operate on a much higher level as well between themselves as with the academic departments. The latter have much potential to be included and play a vital part of the support effort that delivers top level of student satisfaction and experience.

For this study to become truly representative of the dynamics in the demand for student support for the whole of the UK, the entire student population, including the rest of the undergraduate students as well as the post graduate students, shall be surveyed. This has to be done, at least, in a representative set of UK higher institutions and to cover more than just one academic year.

## Introduction

The transition to university life is a stressful time for the young person. Not only must students learn to navigate a new academic system, they are often leaving home for the first time. Researchers have previously investigated the student life stress (Zascavagea et al. 2012), sources of stress among students (Robotham, 2008; Firth, 1986; Ross et al., 1999) and have come up with a student life stress inventory (Gadzella, 1994 and 2004).

It is expected that the concerns that students have intensify during some periods of the academic year and recede during other periods. This is understandable as stress is neither evenly distributed nor the sources of it are the same throughout the phases of the academic year. Student services practitioners support that view and share that among new students, in September there are more cases of reported homesickness and loneliness, in October of alcohol abuse, suicidal thoughts, self-harming, in November of depression, anxiety and so on (see focus groups discussions for more detail). However, it was felt that although student support services practitioners might have good knowledge about the general waves of demand for their services, some quantitative data confirming that would be of good use to them. Also, any hidden demand for services might be exposed and therefore addressed.

At the same time the help-seeking behaviour of students show that students who experience difficulties do not necessarily engage with support services so it is important to explore factors that influence this engagement.

Lastly, as the available resources to provide support are restricted and it is unlikely that this will change in the nearest future, there is a need to use the available resources for providing student support more efficiently. This cannot only help deliver more support but also can make possible the introduction of new services or new ways to deliver those.

## Aims and objectives

This study has three main aims:

1. to collect primary data identifying the pattern of specific common problems that first year students experience throughout the academic year
2. to identify whether there are specific patterns in help-seeking behaviour in regards to student support services
3. whether there are factors that influence whether a student seeks support with student support services or not.

By exploring these areas, we aim to determine whether there is a dynamic 'psychological profile' of the academic year in terms of challenges that first year students face in the transition to university. With this greater understanding, specific student support services can be better tuned into the needs of first year students allowing us to better co-operate and work more efficiently.

## Methods

### Study design

To achieve the aims of the study three strands of data collection were developed. The three strands used a mix of surveys, questionnaires, individual interviews and focus groups involving first year students and student support practitioners.

### Data collection

#### Monthly concerns surveys

Ten student volunteers helped conduct the monthly surveys regarding what were the common concerns of first year students. First year students based in university accommodation were asked to answer a short survey regarding their concerns during each of the first three months in semester one and again during three months in semester two (September, October, November, February, March and April). The monthly surveys have captured nearly 50 % of all residents in university accommodation (See Appendix 1).

#### Questionnaire

Secondly, a questionnaire was developed to gather more in depth information about when first year students felt the need for support. A further nine students were recruited, as paid interns through the Career Services Internship Programme, to administer the questionnaire.



A convenience sample of first year students participated all within the month of March. The individual interviews have returned 388 filled questionnaires, which is nearly 20% of all first year students.

The students were asked about the concerns they experience, when they experienced those concerns, whether or not they sought support for the concern and about factors that facilitated or hindered their support seeking. Finally they were also asked to provide some basic demographic information (e.g. age, course of study).

### Interviews and focus groups

Finally, a series of discussions were planned with focus groups consisting of student services practitioners. Individual meetings were carried with Heads of Units/Departments. This was followed by a focus group discussion with all staff of each unit to record their views and the information they have on what are the most common issues their services tackle during the phases of the academic year. Finally a meeting with all heads of Units took place to map the existing deployment of services and resources against the needs for support of the students. The overarching aim of the interviews and focus groups was to gathering information from the providers of support services regarding how they currently address the concerns of the students, what they plan in terms of service development and also checking the validity of data coming from students. The focus groups discussions, seven in total, took place in March and April. The final meeting with heads of units took place in early May. Over 90 % of units' staff attended the focus groups discussions. All Heads of units participated.

### Data analysis

For the data collected from the questionnaires, quantitative analyses were conducted. Descriptive statistics (e.g. frequencies/percentages) were to identify the characteristics of our data using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 21). The demographics of students were compared with data from the registry.

## Research findings

### Demographics

#### Monthly concerns surveys

The monthly surveys have captured 47.8 % of all residents in university accommodation (see Appendix 1).

#### Questionnaire

Three hundred and eighty eight first year students responded to the questionnaire. This represents 19.8 % of all first year students in the university [see Table 3(Q2r)]. The average age of the students was 19.03 years. More females ( $N = 234$ , 61%) than males ( $N = 152$ , 39%) participated though this reflects the demographics of the first years as a whole [see Tables 1 (Q1x) and Table 2 (Q2x)]. The participants came from a broad range of schools though some were more represented than others (See Table Q4xr). The majority of students surveyed lived in halls of residence [ $N = 354$ , 91%; see Table 5(Q5x)].

The results regarding the age of the participants are what is to be expected – most first year students, 78 %, were age 18 or 19. Another 19 % were age between 20 and 22 and only 2.8 % were above that age. The oldest participant was 32 years of age.

**Table 1 (Q1x): Age**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18	179	46.1	46.1	46.1
	19	126	32.5	32.5	78.6
	20	47	12.1	12.1	90.7
	21	16	4.1	4.1	94.8
	22	11	2.8	2.8	97.7
	23	3	.8	.8	98.5
	25	1	.3	.3	98.7
	29	1	.3	.3	99.0
	30	1	.3	.3	99.2
	32	3	.8	.8	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The next demographic question addresses gender. Participants were given three options – male, female and other. None answered 'other', and the split between male/female first year students is approximately 39% by 61%. This is in line with data from Registry, which shows 35 % by 65 % split in favour of female students [see Table 2(Q2x) and Table 3(Q2r)].

**Table 2 (Q2x): Gender**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	152	39.4	39.4	39.4
	Female	234	60.6	60.6	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

**Table 3 (Q2r): University of Dundee: First year full-time entrant numbers, by school and gender 2013/4**

College	Schools	Female	Male	Total
CASE	Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design	152	49	201
	School of Computing	9	52	61
	School of Engineering, Physics and Mathematics	19	108	127
	<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>389</b>
CASS	School of Business	57	84	141
	School of Education, Social Work & Community Education	117	14	131

College	Schools	Female	Male	Total
	School of Humanities	104	74	178
	School of Law	70	41	111
	School of Psychology	84	24	108
	School of the Environment	88	72	160
	<b>Total</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>829</b>
CLS	School of Life Sciences Learning & Teaching	101	52	153
	<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>153</b>
CMDN	School of Dentistry	47	27	74
	School of Medicine	76	51	127
	School of Nursing and Midwifery	354	33	387
	<b>Total</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>588</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1,278</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>1,959</b>

*Note: the figures relate to full-time first year entrants and exclude those repeating first year. It also excludes visiting or non-graduating students and any student who dropped out within 14 days of beginning their course.*

*Source: Registry, 2nd May 2014*

The results from Q3x: Home postcode were discarded due to inconsistencies.

*Note: the interns, conducting the survey, were trained to explain that question as postcode of vacation time/parents place but yet, many students recorded their term time address.*

The results from Question 4x show that first year students from all academic schools participated. These broadly correspond to data from registry [see Table 4(Q4x) and Table 3(Q2r)]. The only significant difference is that Nursing student were less represented among participants. This is due to many of them being on placement during March, when the Questionnaire was fielded.

**Table 4 (Q4x): School of study**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	
Valid	Business	27	7.0	7.1
	Computing	15	3.9	3.9
	Continuing Education	1	.3	.3
	Dentistry	21	5.4	5.5
	Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design	46	11.9	12.0
	Education, Social Work and Community Education	12	3.1	3.1
	Engineering, Physics & Maths	21	5.4	5.5

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
	Environment	51	13.2	13.4
	Humanities	38	9.8	9.9
	Law	21	5.4	5.5
	Life Sciences, Teaching & Learning	46	11.9	12.0
	Medicine	34	8.8	8.9
	Nursing and Midwifery	28	7.3	7.3
	Psychology	21	5.4	5.5
	Total	382	99.0	100.0
	99	3	.8	
Missing	System	1	.3	
	Total	4	1.0	
<b>Total</b>		<b>386</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Question Q5x gives information regarding the type of accommodation first year students were in. Again, participants came from every possible category. It is not surprising that above 91 % of them live in university accommodation when the fact that there are 1,600 beds available and the total number of first year students is 1,959 [See Table 5(Q5x)].

**Table 5 (Q5x): What type of accommodation do you stay in?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Parents home	8	2.1	2.1	2.1
	Own home	2	.5	.5	2.6
	Private landlord (rented)	18	4.7	4.7	7.3
Valid	University	354	91.7	91.7	99.0
	Other	4	1.0	1.0	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Based on the results from the demographic questions asked, it can be concluded that the survey was representative of the population of first year students in University of Dundee.

### Research questions

The next set of questions from the Questionnaire delivers information on what were the specific concerns that first year students had and how they addressed those. These are questions from Q1 to Q10. They can be grouped in three main research questions.

#### Research Question 1: What are the main concerns of first year students?

Data from the questionnaire and surveys were used to identify the top 10 common concerns of students. The results from the six monthly surveys that were completed during this academic year can also be used to produce a top ten concerns list. These can be mapped against the top ten concerns as perceived by first year students in March, when the

Questionnaire was issued. It is not surprising that the two lists largely overlap and their top three concerns remain the same (See Table 6 and Appendix 2).

**Table 6: Top ten concerns for first year students, a snapshot vs. monthly records**

Rank	As per Questionnaire in March	As per Monthly Surveys
1	Academic Pressure (14.7%)	Academic Pressure (14.6%)
2	Procrastination (13.7%)	Procrastination (10.8%)
3	Feeling tired all the time (9.3%)	Feeling tired all the time (10.1%)
4	Exam panic (8.9%)	Stress (8.8%)
5	Stress (8.7%)	Exam panic (7.9%)
6	Sleep problems (8.1%)	Sleep problems (7.3%)
7	Financial issues (6.5%)	Financial issues (5.3%)
8	Disputes with flat mates (4.5%)	Anxiety (4.2%)
9	Adjustment to University life (4.4%)	Perfectionism (3.5%)
10	Anxiety (3.2%)	Low mood, mood swings (3.0%)

However, when the top ten concerns that first year students have reported in March are compared with the top ten concerns they reported during the different months of the academic year, some discrepancies can also be identified. For example Exam panic and Stress swap places, which can be explained by the fact that In March the second exam diet is just about to begin. Naturally, Exam panic can be expected to overtake the Stress category, though both are at a high level. Disputes with flatmates also seem logical to be higher in March, as this affects the preparation for exams. Additionally, most first year students have made arrangements for their next year accommodation and do feel less pressure to put up with what they are unhappy about their present flatmates, so tension may raise because of that. Anxiety future higher in the monthly surveys as first year students gradually learn how to cope with it as the academic year progresses. The only unexpected result is the lower place of the Adjusting to University life as per the monthly surveys. It would be logical to expect this to be the other way around as this concern is at a very high level in September and also high in October.

### **Aggregated concerns**

The 34 common concerns among students are inter-related and if to be properly addressed and efficiently managed can be grouped in three distinct categories: academic issues; mental health issues; and wellbeing. This approach also helps take into consideration all the data that was gathered and not just consider the top ten concerns. The Table 7 below shows which specific concerns were grouped together. This aggregation was used in further analyses below.

**Table 7: Common concerns - aggregated<sup>1</sup>**

Common concerns – aggregated
Academic issues
Academic pressures
Exam panic

<sup>1</sup> The grouping of the categories was firstly done independently by two of the members of the research team, this then was presented and discussed with Heads of Units of Student Services Directorate and, finally, after taking all that into consideration, discussed within the research team and the categories were grouped as above.

Perfectionism
Procrastination
<b>Mental health</b>
Addiction (incl. to computer games)
Alcohol abuse
Anger issues
Anxiety
Asperger (ASD) <sup>2</sup>
Depression
Eating disorders
Feeling tired all the time
Low mood, mood swings
Low self-esteem
Mania and bipolar disorders
Panic attacks
Schizophrenia
Self-harm
Sleep problems
Suicidal thoughts
<b>Wellbeing</b>
Adjusting to university life
Bereavement, grief and loss
Bullying
Disputes with flat-mates
Financial issues
Harassment
Living alongside mental illness
Landlord issues
Loneliness
Relationships
Sexuality
Stress
Trauma
Withdrawal

## Research Question 2: When during the year do concerns occur?

### Top 10 concerns- results - questionnaire data

#### *Academic pressure*

There are two peaks during the academic year (See Figure 1). Not surprisingly these happen in December, which coincides with the first exam diet, and in March just before students go

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<sup>2</sup> We recognise the fact that 'Aspergers' is not a mental health issue but rather classed, within the autistic spectrum, as a disability. However, as addressing the issue can be more efficiently done by grouping it with mental health issues, this is where we have put it.

for Easter break followed by the semester two exam diet. There is a gradual increase of Academic pressures in the two months before each peak – in October and November before the first one and in January and February, before the second one. Interestingly, Academic pressure remains high during all months, including summer months. This can be explained by the fact that some students resit exams in July/August and have to revise during the summer.

### *Procrastination*

The pattern of Procrastination is marked by two distinct peaks, one in December and one in March (see Figure 2). There is a gradual increase of the concern from September to November and from January into February. This can be explained by the ever increasing academic demands and the obvious struggle of students to meet the submission dates for course work and be ready to sit the exams during the exam diets in December and in April/May. Interestingly, Procrastination remains at a high level throughout the entire calendar year.

### *Feeling tired all the time*

Feeling tired all the time shows one peak during the calendar year and this falls in December (see Figure 3). The concern begins to increase from its lowest point in July all the way till December and then plateaus at 58 % of students in January and February. This is followed by a gradual decrease until July.

### *Exam panic*

The pattern of the Exam panic category shows two very distinct peaks (see Figure 4). The first one comes in December, which coincides with the first exam diet and the second one comes in March, when students submit final course work/projects and go for a Easter break, followed by the second Exam diet in April/May. As expected, there is a big drop of this concern from December to January. Interestingly, the second peak, the one in March, is of a much lesser magnitude.

### *Stress*

The pattern of the stress category shows two distinctive peaks and a plateau (See Figure 5). The peaks are in December and in March and the plateau is in April and May. This can be explained by the two exam diets, in December and in April/May, and the submission of course work and projects in March. The stress level in December is much higher than the one in March. This can be explained by the fact that this is the very first exam diet for a first year student and they learn what to expect for the second one.

### *Sleep problems*

The pattern of the Sleep problems category shows two peaks, one in December and one in February (See Figure 6). There is a ten percentage point drop in January and there are a further two peaks, one in September and one in May, but these are much less significant, as there is only a couple of percentage points difference compared with the months before and after these.

### *Financial issues*

The concern about financial issues is fairly high throughout the year, including the summer months (See Figure 7). This can be explained by the fact that most students do not have a stable independent income but tend to have monthly expenses that cannot be avoided. Yet, there are two peaks in this category, one in December and one in February, with the December one a little bit higher than the one in February.

### *Disputes with flatmates*

The category Disputes with flatmates peaks in November and again in February. There is a gradual increase in the months from September onwards and decrease from February till summer months (See Figure 8).

### *Adjusting to university life*

Adjusting to university life has one very distinct peak, which falls in September, when all first year undergraduate students join the university (See Figure 9). This is very much to be expected and the uninterrupted decrease of this concern almost every month after that can be explained by the success in adjusting to university life that most students achieve and quickly so.

### *Anxiety*

Anxiety is the only category which shows three distinct peaks during the academic year. The first one falls in September, the second, which is also the highest, appears in December and the last one comes in March (See Figure 10).



Figure 1: Academic pressure

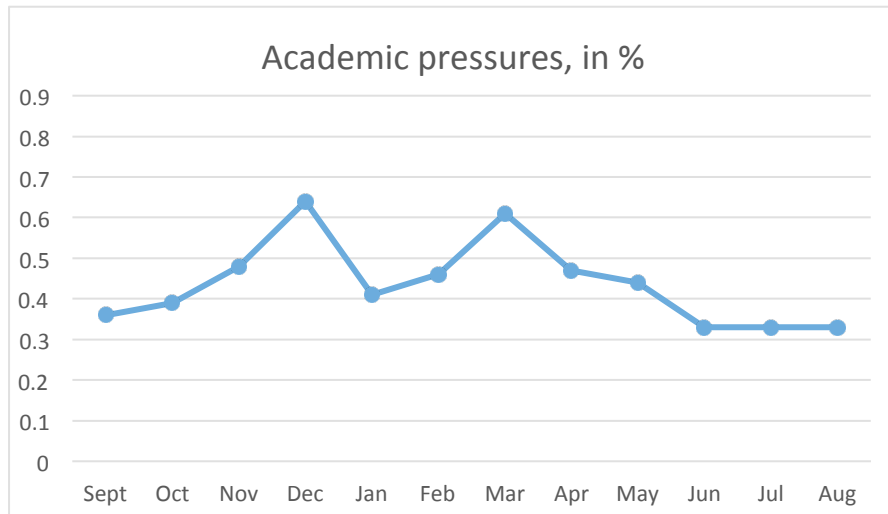


Figure 2: Procrastination

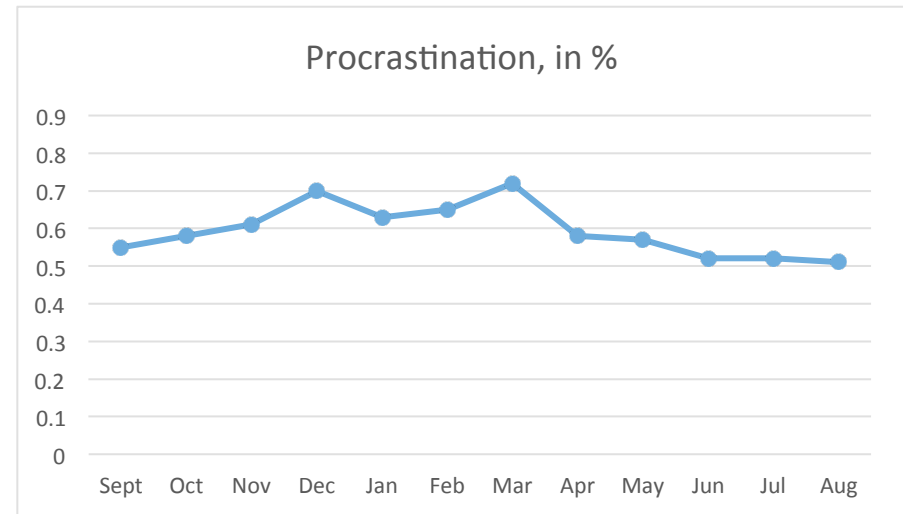


Figure 3: Feeling tired all the time

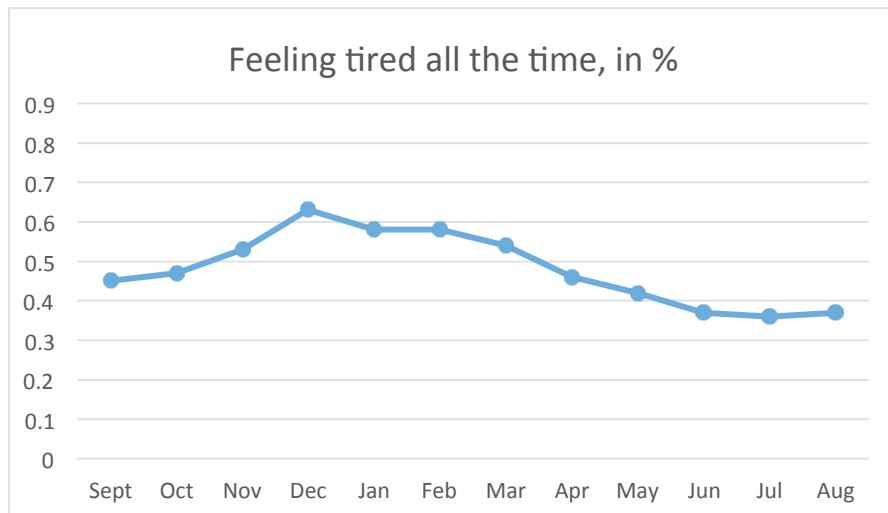


Figure 4: Exam panic

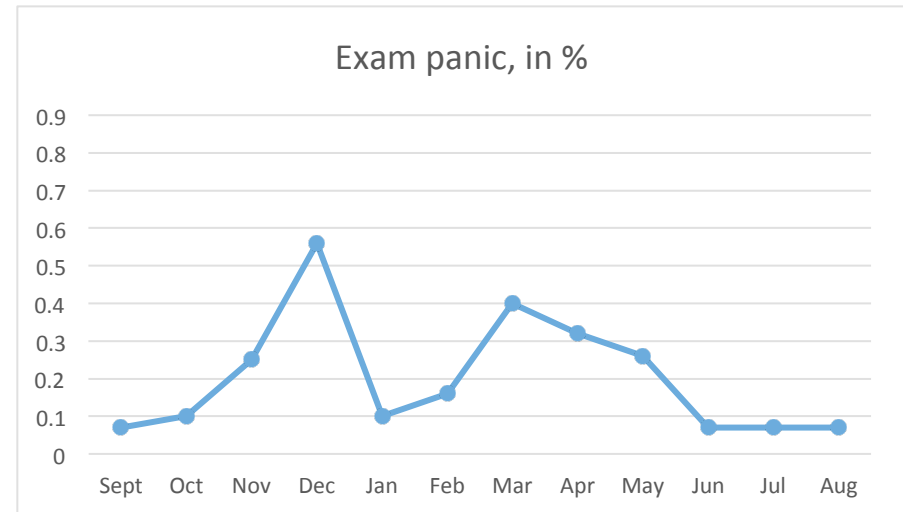


Figure 5: Stress

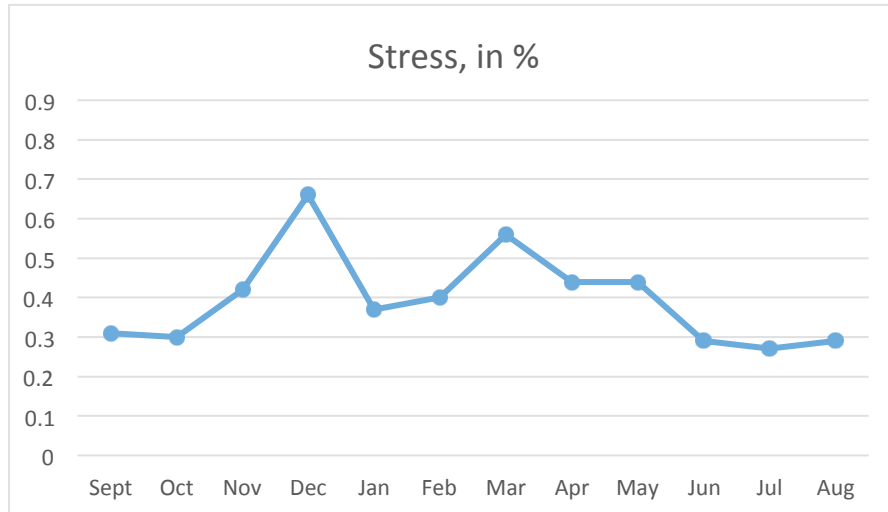


Figure 6: Sleep problems

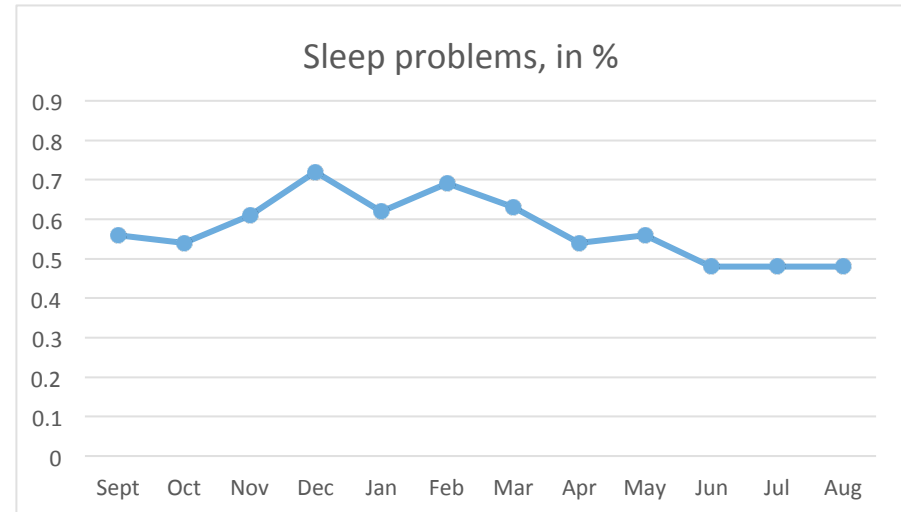


Figure 7: Financial issues

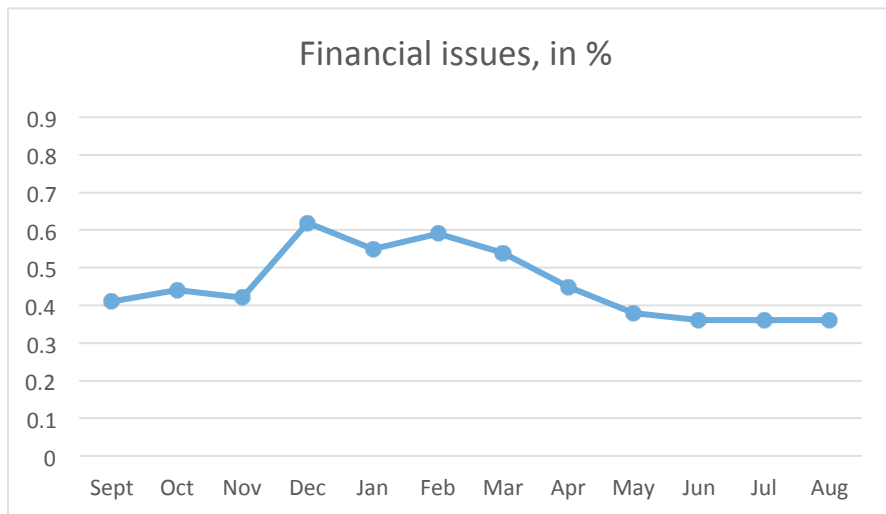


Figure 8: Disputes with flatmates

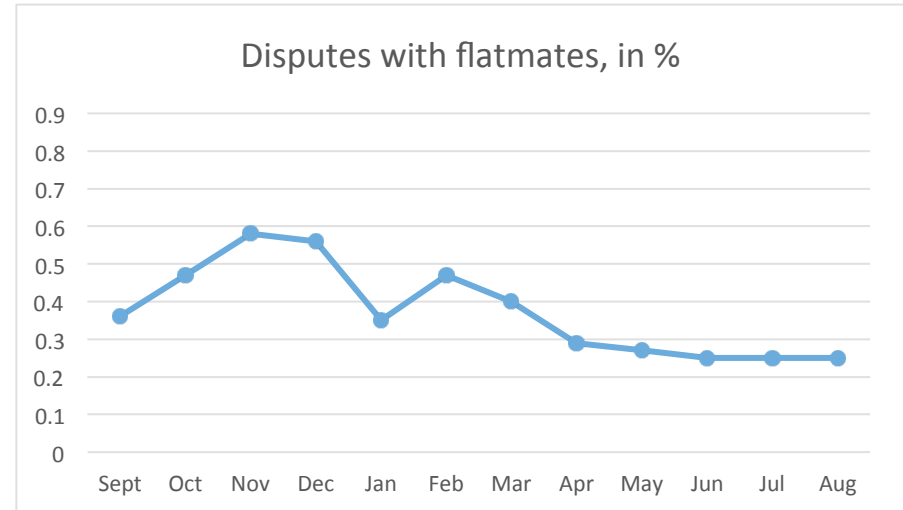


Figure 9: Adjusting to university life

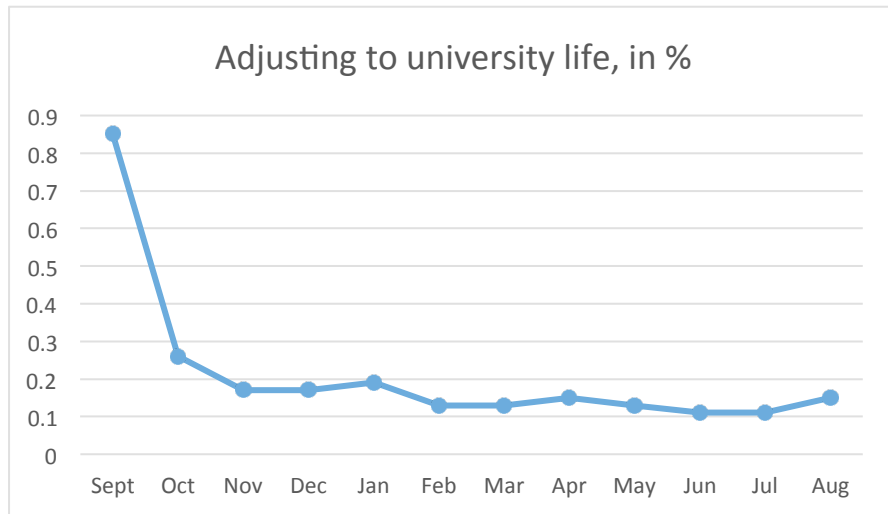
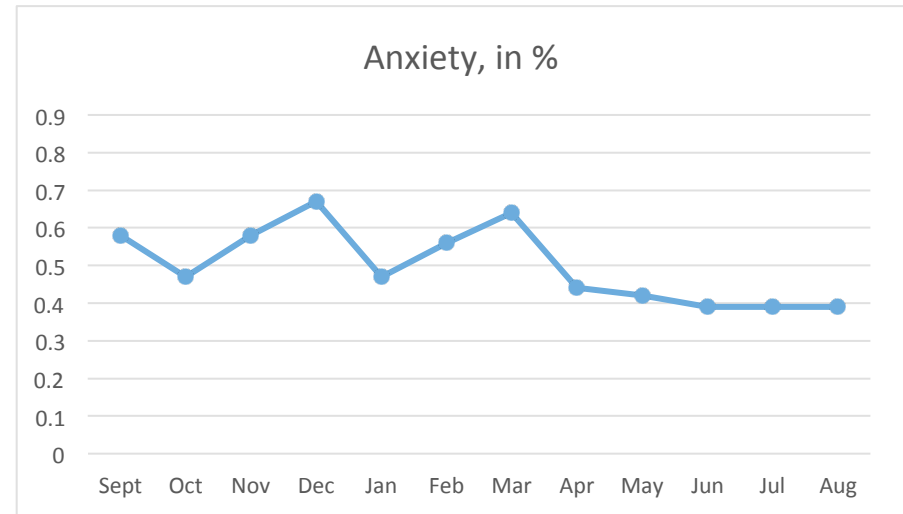


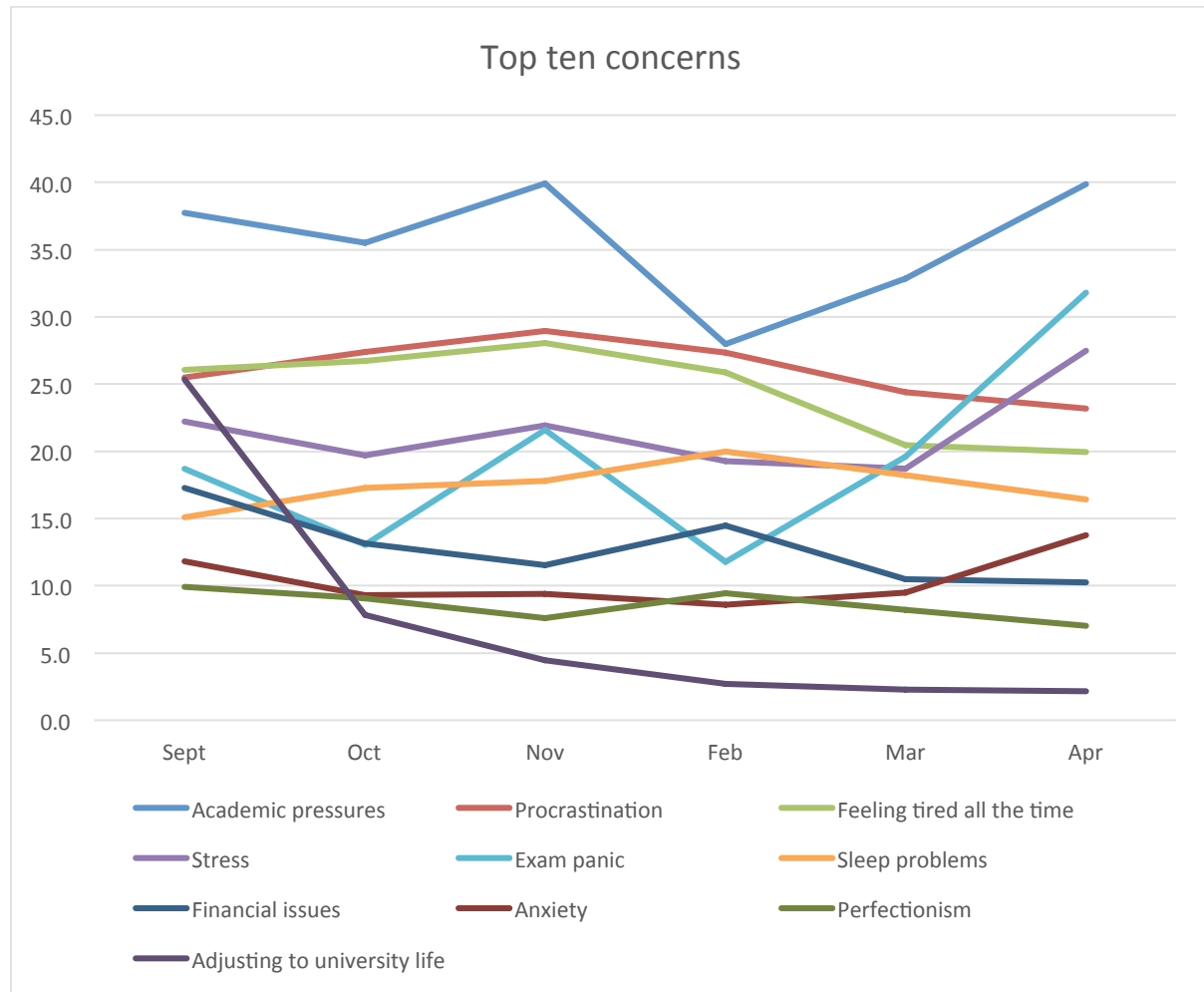
Figure 10: Anxiety



### Top 10 concerns – results - monthly surveys

The top ten concerns for first year students based on the results from the monthly surveys are shown in the Figure 11 below. The graph shows that although not all concerns are strongly correlated, there are groups with the ten that are, such as Academic pressure and Exam panic, Procrastination and Feeling tired all the time, Anxiety and Stress.

**Figure 11: Top ten concerns for first year students, monthly survey results**



### Aggregated concerns

#### Academic issues

When grouped together the concerns that of academic nature appear to present with a pattern that shows two distinct peaks, one in December and one in March (See Figure 12-1). The first peak can be explained by the fact that the semester one exam diet fall in December. In March, on the other hand, final course work and projects are due to be submitted, hence the peak. April and May also show high values, which can be explained by the second exam diet that falls in those months. Academic pressure remains considerably high during the summer as well, which can be explained by the fact that some students have to resit exams in July/August.

How significant is this concern to first year students is also shown by the share of positive answers received. Table 8 shows that over 82 % of all students surveyed have recorded a positive answer to the question whether they experience academic issues.

**Table 8: Academic Issues - aggregated**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	69	17.8	17.8	17.8
	Yes	319	82.2	82.2	100.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>388</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The above results can be compared with the results from the six monthly surveys, which are shown in Figure 12-2. This also shows two peaks, one in November and one in April. As the survey covered November but not December, it can be concluded that the first peak in both data sets largely overlaps. There was a monthly survey done in April, so it showed the effect of the imminent start of the exam diet. This can explain the discrepancy with the results from the Questionnaire, which were collected only in March, when most essays and other written work was due for submission.

### *Mental health issues*

The mental health issues aggregated category shows one distinctive peak during the year, in December, and a smaller one in February (See Figure 13-1). When taken into consideration the fact that most students go back to families during the December/January break, which helps them to relax, it seems there is actually just one peak, which coincides with the shortest daylight time of the year. Interestingly, mental health as an aggregated concern, remains quite high and the line appears somehow flat. This can be explained by the fact that if someone has a mental health concern, this does not go away entirely but is aggravated every now and then by external factors or by the cyclical nature of the mental concern itself.

The percentage of students reporting a mental health issue, almost 71%, appears lower than of those of experiencing an academic issue but it is still very high (See Table 9).

**Table 9: Mental Health issues - aggregated**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	113	29.1	29.1	29.1
	Yes	275	70.9	70.9	100.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>388</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Again, these results can be compared with the results from the six monthly surveys (See Figure 13-2). Both data sets show a peak in February but data from monthly surveys shows a peak in October, while the data from the Questionnaire shows a peak in December. This finding is interesting because as the Questionnaire was issued in March, how students felt in February was still fresh for them to recall. It would have been more difficult to recall how they felt during the first semester. This means that the results from the monthly surveys

could be regarded as more accurate, which would mean that student support needs to account for the need of more mental health resources needed to be in place in October.

**Wellbeing issues**

The aggregated category Wellbeing issues shows two distinctive peaks in September and in December and a third one, of a smaller magnitude, in March (Figure 14-1). The peak in September can be explained by the challenges of the initial transition to university. The other two peaks though are more difficult to be explained. It would be logical to expect a constant decrease of wellbeing issues as the academic year progresses and students get more settled and adapt to their new life in the university. Yet, data shows two further peaks. It seems that they appear mostly as a result of the trend in Academic issues, as there is a high correlation between these events.

Again, a significant number of students, over 73%, have recorded a positive answer on the question whether they experience a wellbeing issue (See Table 10 and Figure 14-2). In fact, their percentage falls between the other two categories. This is also significant because it shows that the wellbeing category is not entirely resulting from the other two, for if this was the case it would have resulted in more students reporting a wellbeing issue than those reporting academic issue or mental health issue.

**Table 10: Wellbeing issues - aggregated**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	103	26.5	26.5	26.5
	Yes	285	73.5	73.5	100.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>388</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

These results can be compared with the results from the six monthly surveys (See Figure 14-2). Here there is only one distinctive peak, which appears in September. This can easily be explained by the challenges of the transition from home to university life, which are at their highest during the first few weeks of the semester. The data from Graph 14-3 also shows a slight increase of wellbeing issues in February and then a gradual decrease of the concerns in March and April. The pattern of the wellbeing issues that has emerged from the monthly surveys appears more logical, though the effect of academic issues on wellbeing issues cannot be discounted.

Figure 12-1: Academic issues – aggregated, Questionnaire

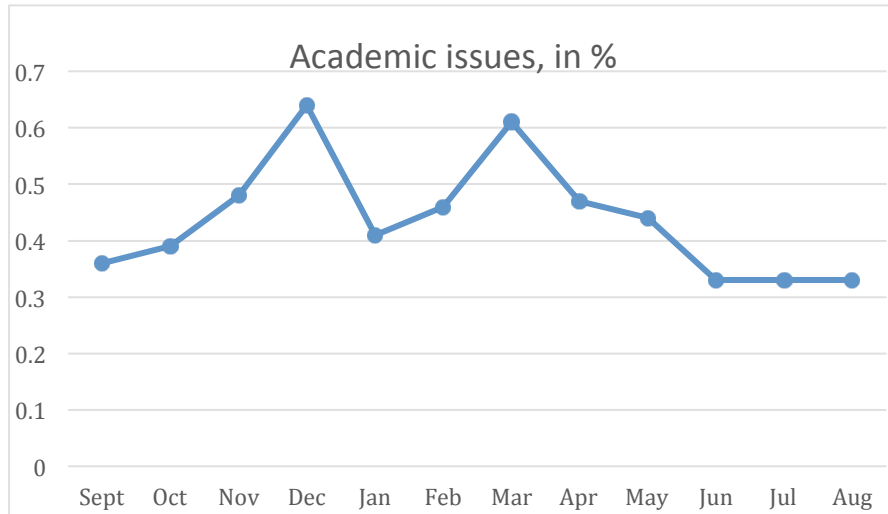


Figure 13-1: Mental health issues, aggregated, Questionnaire

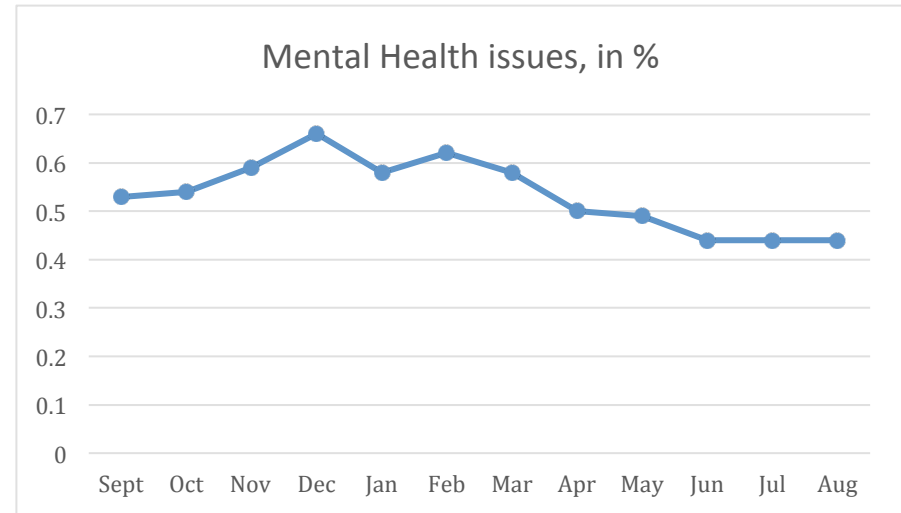


Figure 14-1: Wellbeing issues – aggregated, Questionnaire

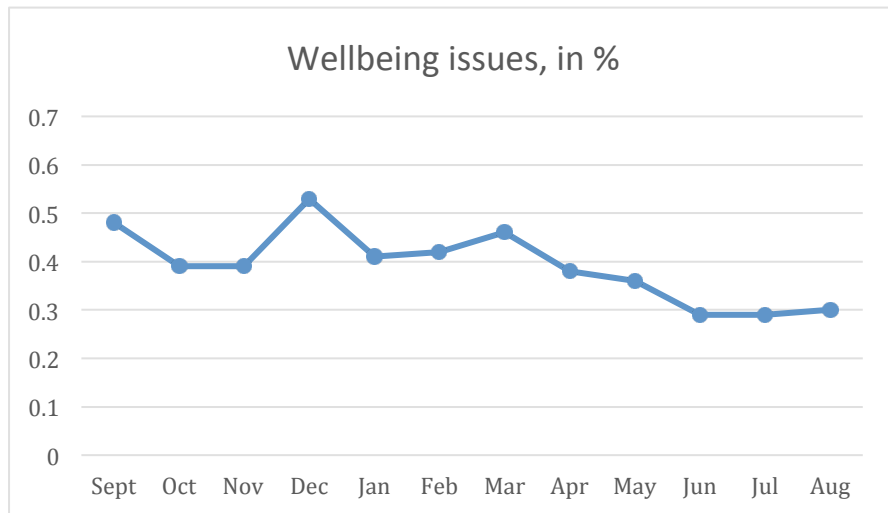


Figure 12-2: Academic issues – aggregated, monthly surveys

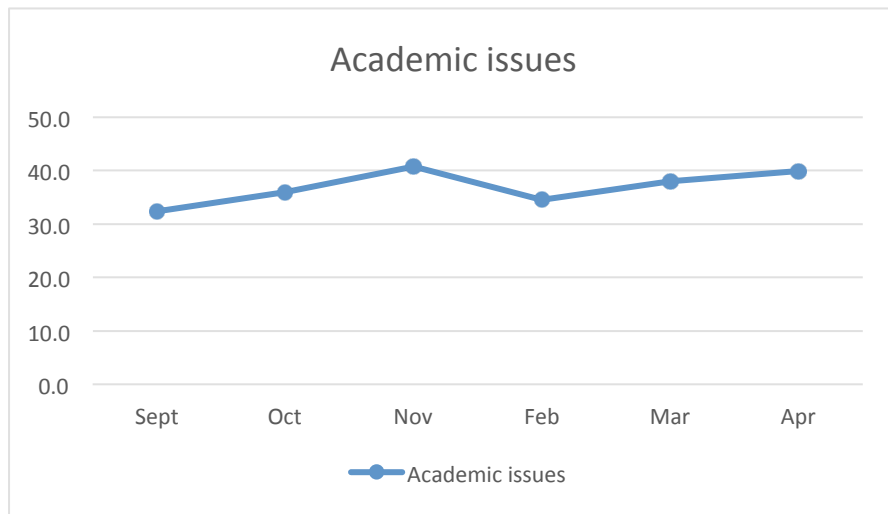


Figure 13-2: Mental health issues – aggregated, monthly surveys

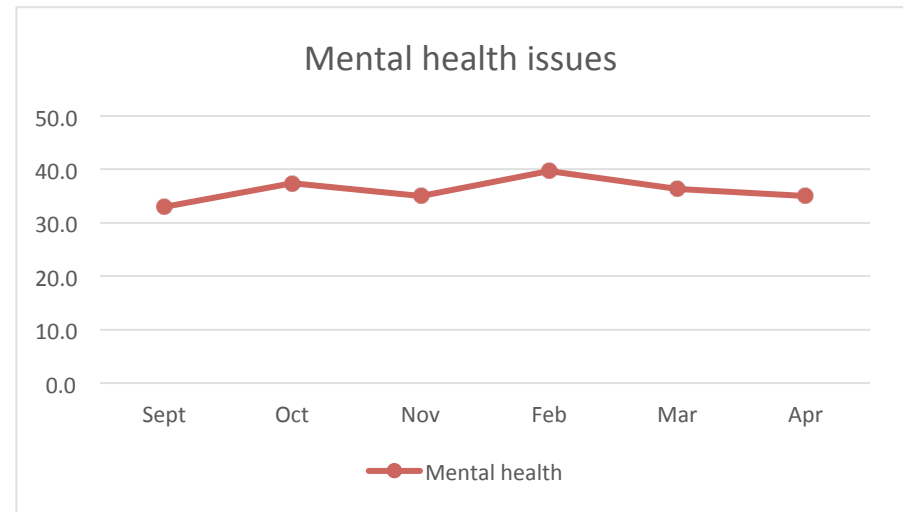
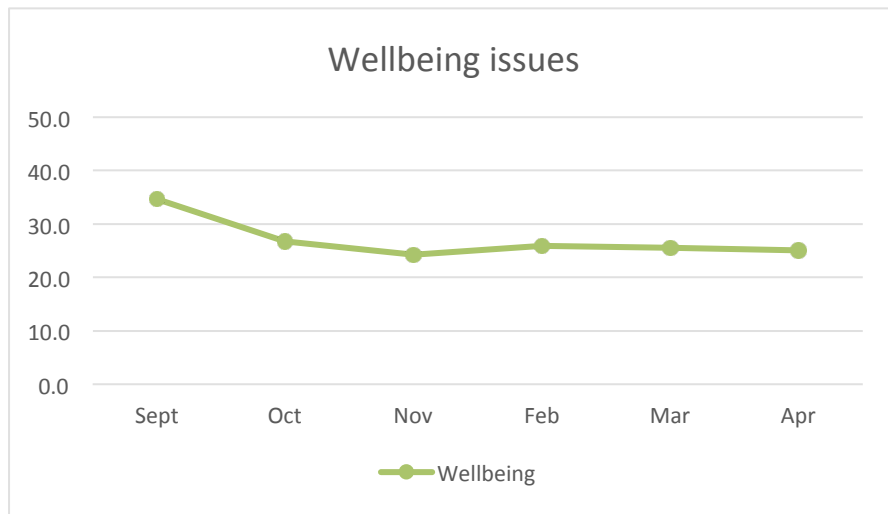


Figure 14-2: Wellbeing issues – aggregated, monthly surveys





*All issues combined – the 'Psychological' profile of an academic year*

When all categories are put together a clear annual pattern appears (See Figure 15-1). This proves the validity of our initial hypothesis that there is such a pattern. The 'psychological' profile of the academic year appears to have three peaks, one in September, which of the least significant magnitude, a second one in December, which is of the most significant magnitude and finally one in March. The peak in September is better explained by the transition to university and the related high level of anxiety and stress. The peak in December results from the very high levels of all three aggregated categories during that month of the year. The case for March is of a similar kind to that of December.

These results can be compared with the results from the six monthly surveys (see Figure 15-2).

The results from Figure 15-1 can also be mapped against the number of students who dropped out of the university, see Figure 15-3. It appears that the high level of concerns early in September is immediately translated into a jump in the number of students who drop out in October. Then the number of dropping out students remains high during November, December and January but decreases in February, March and April. The peak in students dropping out in October can be explained with the realisation what the chosen course/subject really means and it is then logical that those whose expectations were significantly different might have decided to withdraw. This can also be explained with the fact that if a student withdraws early, they can keep their SAAS funding intact and use it the next year.

Interestingly, the two peaks in the level of concerns during the academic year do not appear to have directly translate into an increase of the number of students who drop out (See Figure 15-3). In January, for example, there is a significant drop of the level of concerns but almost a peak in the numbers of students dropping out. The level of concerns peaks in December but the number of students who drop out remains flat in that month. Similarly, In March, there is a peak in the level of concerns but a decrease in the number of student who drop out. Those findings are significant as the objective of providing support to students is not only to positively influence their student experience but also to reduce the number of students dropping out of university. The fact that the level of concerns does not correlate highly with the trend in the number of students dropping of university out can only be explained by the level of resilience of those who drop out. If this is significantly low, any level of concerns would be too high for them to cope with and the only way forward for them seems the way out. If this is true, then helping students build up their resilience would help them to be able to withstand the initial pressures of academic life and engage with student support for further help if needed.

Figure 15-1: 'Psychological' profile of an academic year – all issues, aggregated, Questionnaire

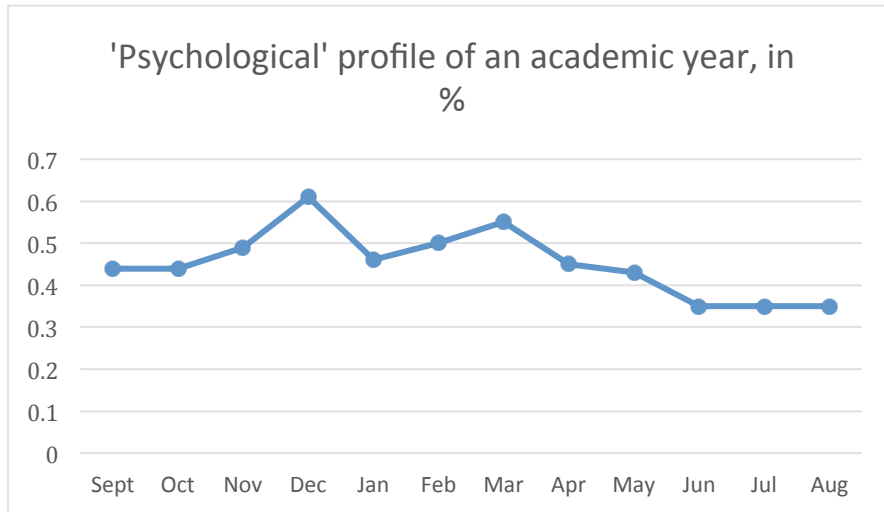


Figure 15-2: All issues – aggregated, monthly surveys

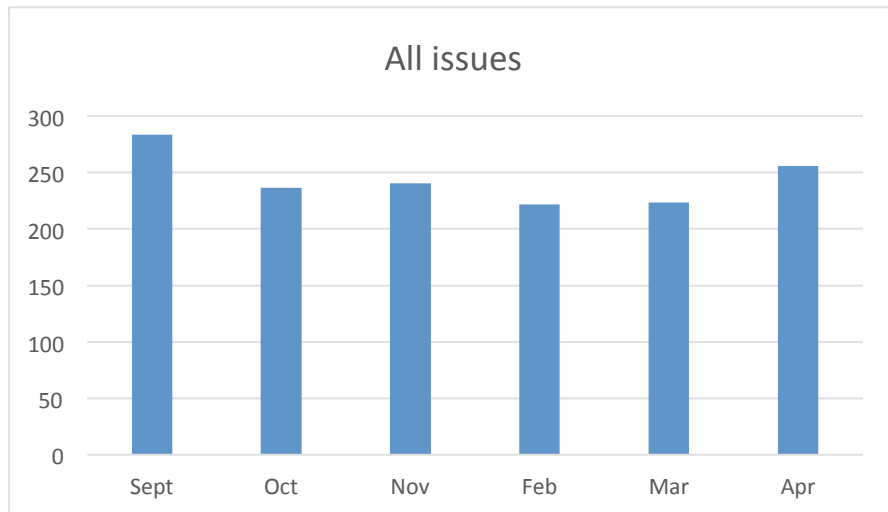
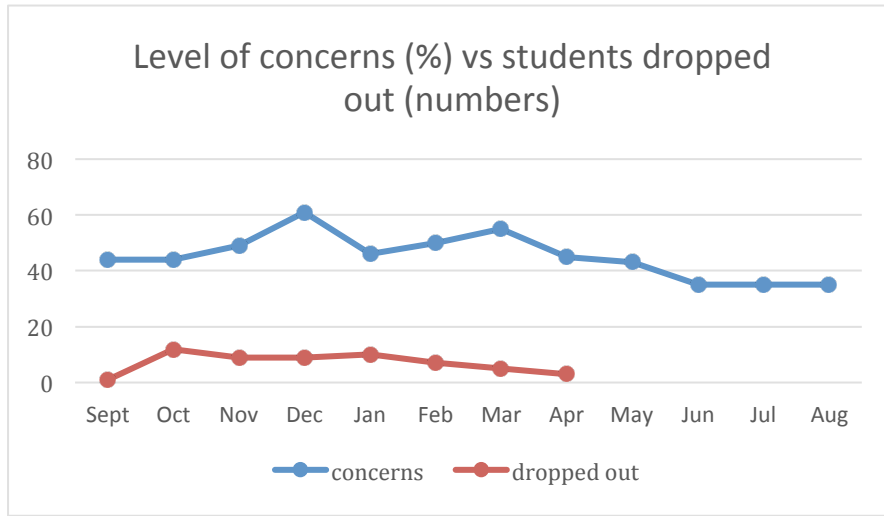


Figure 15-3: Level of concerns (%) vs number of students dropped out (numbers)



## Discussion

### Top 10 concerns: questionnaire data

#### *Academic pressure*

A surprise result is the fact that in September the Academic pressures are almost as high as in October. As this occurs after any possible resits and before any essays are due, it seems that the anticipation of the academic demands of higher education run quite high among freshers. Obviously, this anxiety needs to be addressed in the way the transition to university is supported by Student Services. Academic Schools might also need to consider earlier engagement with new students, including during the months prior their arriving at the university. For example, providing more information on what students can expect and what academic support is available, could help removing the fear of the unknown and reduce the anxiety about how difficult is to go through the first year in the university.

#### *Procrastination*

The data shows that making the transition to university, where independent learning requires considerable level of self-discipline and motivation is a challenge. It is right for the Student Services to address the issue by directing resources to tackle this issue. This would be especially valuable if done very early in the academic year, possibly even before students arrive, so they can get off to a good start and learn to pace themselves as early as possible.

Procrastination comes second in the top ten common concerns, which were surveyed. It very much repeats the pattern of the Academic pressure category, with two peaks in December and in March. The gradual increase of the concern in the two months leading to the peak is also present. The only significant difference between Academic pressures and Procrastination is that Procrastination remains at a high level throughout the academic year, and during summer months.

#### *Feeling tired all the time*

The data can be explained by the number of hours with a day light, which undoubtedly affects the students. This result shows that Student Services need to address the issue, possibly by offering advice and providing coping strategies for the young people to learn and apply.

#### *Exam panic*

The data could be explained with the fact that going through the first exam diet in December allows the students to accumulate valuable experience and this reduces the anxiety from the approaching second exam diet.

#### *Stress*

Stress remains sufficiently high during the entire calendar year, showing that first year students have many other sources of stress and not just those of academic nature, although the latter are clearly of most concern to them. Student Services can

address this issue by equipping students with knowledge and skills to cope with stress, as stress is not necessarily a negative category in life.

### *Sleep problems*

The peak in December can be explained by the first exam diet and also perhaps by the long dark hours during that time of the year. The latter can also be the reason for the peak in February. The drop in January could be explained by the fact that between middle of December and middle of January most students are back home with family and not having classes or exams helps reduce the level of this concern. The small peak in September could be best explained by the nature of the Welcome week, which is packed by late night events etc. The second small peak in May could be explained by the second exam diet.

### *Financial issues*

The peak in December can be explained by the coming Christmas/vacation time and the additional expenses that are related to these events. There is a slight drop in January, which can be explained with the fact that most students spend a few weeks back home with family. The peak in February can be explained with the realisation of the amount overspend during December/January and the need to tighten the belt for a while. There is also a very small drop happening in November, which can be explained with the fact that students prepare for exams in December and feel less pressure to spend by going out and socialising, though not everyone is the same.

### *Disputes with flatmates*

The pattern can be explained by the fact that for the vast majority of first year students, September is the first time they have to share facilities with non-family and in many cases random people. They try to cope with it by compromising and putting up with issues but slowly their patience wears thin and when the exams approach this is the time when most people feel unhappy about the situation in their flats. The slight drop in December can be explained by the fact that this is exam time and even those who love to party all the time need to revise and sit exams. The fact that the drop is not that significant shows that there are also domestic issues such as keeping the flat clean and the sink empty, which tend to get worse when students feel overwhelmed by the academic demands. The gradual decrease of the category after February can be explained by two facts, one that most students learn how to resolve their differences as time goes on and secondly with the fact that after February most of them have signed lease contracts for the next academic year and become more willing to tolerate the situation in their present flats anticipating an imminent move to a new flat in June.

### *Adjusting to university life*

The very significant drop in this category from September to October can be explained by the efficiency of the Welcome Week programme and all the events hosted by academic and non-academic departments aiming at helping the new students to adapt and enjoy their student life. However, more can be done for those few who still struggle to adjust even after a number of months as students. The

challenge here is for the Student Services to be able to identify and engage with those students if they are to be offered support.

### *Anxiety*

The data can be explained with the move from home to university in September and then with the exams in December. In March, all course work and projects need to be submitted to academic departments, and the pressure of this naturally drives the anxiety high. Anxiety is not necessarily a negative category, so what Student Services can do is to help reduce this part of it that is related with the fear of the unknown, rather than to try to remove it as a concern altogether.

### *Aggregated concerns*

The analysis shows that it seems that it is important to provide students with as much information regarding the transition to university and what awaits them when living an independent life, so they are aware of the challenges ahead and can plan how to overcome them before they are faced with those. It also seems appropriate to equip the students with knowledge and skills to allow them to help themselves without necessarily referring to specialised support departments/units. This can be addressed by giving appropriate advice and information on self-help strategies via direct, face-to-face contact at an enquiry centre, or electronically via web, email or social media, and through short courses or workshops.

The data shows that student experience is formed on the basis of the academic pressures, the ongoing mental health issues and the general well-being of the young people. However, out of these three, the changes in the wellbeing itself seem either caused or at the very least affected by the changes in the two other categories.

The academic issues that students go through cannot be removed due to the fact that they form the core of being a student and advancing one's education. However, what can be done is reducing the stress and anxiety of the unknown by giving enough and appropriate information and equipping the students with practical skills and knowledge how to become more efficient learners. Learning how to learn, how to self-organise and develop a self-discipline that would allow them to realise their intellectual potential to the full seems an important way to support students.

Mental health also seems a considerable challenge for young people. It is surprising how many of them experience some sort of a mental health issue and how many of these are an ongoing problem for them. As not all of these issues require professional help and support it seems important that students are given the chance to address them on their own. This could be achieved by providing the appropriate information and teaching them the necessary skills to do that. Also it seems important to invest resources into helping students to build up their personal resilience, so difficult events in life are overcome based on this rather than cause a mental health issue, which can become significant and debilitating to the person for a long period.

The wellbeing aggregated category, more than the other two, allows for a proactive approach in offering support and investing in prevention. If the students who have

wellbeing concerns can be identified early, they can be offered support before the issues reach a crisis point. The Stay-on-course initiative that brings Academic Schools and Student Services to work co-operatively fills the gap for that need. Also, workshops on procrastination, stress reduction and budgeting are important steps in this direction.

**Research Question 3: What factors influence whether first year students do or do not seek support from student support services?**

*Time during the academic year when first year students seek support*

The results from question Q3 of the questionnaire show when during the academic year support is sought. They show that the first and second semester are distinctly different in this regard [See Figure 16 (Q3)]. The pattern during the first semester shows a rapid increase in the demand for support, followed by a high plateau that occurs in November and December. On the other hand, the pattern during the second semester is an increase in the demand for support from January to February, followed by a sharp decrease in the demand all the way through May.

This results show the importance of addressing the issues that first year students have as early as possible and preferable in the semester one, rather than later. This would make a significant and positive impact on student experience but would also reduce the demand for services later in the year. It is interesting to note that most student services units report a high and constant demand for their services throughout the year. This can only be explained if the demand for their services is constantly greater than what they can offer, so even when demand for services falls in second semester, these units do not feel it as they are used to full capacity. A way forward from this situation, as resources are restricted, would be to increase efficiency and invest in prevention and make available advice on self help strategies.

**Figure 16 (Q3): When did you seek support?**



**Concerns for which first year student sought support**

The results from question Q4 from the questionnaire provides data regarding for which of the top ten concerns first year students sought help most [See Table 11 (Q4) and Figure 17 (Q4)]. The highest scores here are regarding the categories 'disputes with flatmates', followed by 'financial issues' and 'anxiety'. This can be explained by the proactive approach taken by the student support team in university residences. They constantly monitor the situation in the flats by conducting monthly visits to each flat and offer help and support as appropriate. Funding unit also engage with students proactively and have recently invested in promotional activities, which is also reflected in this result. Counselling services are dealing with anxiety among other similar issues.

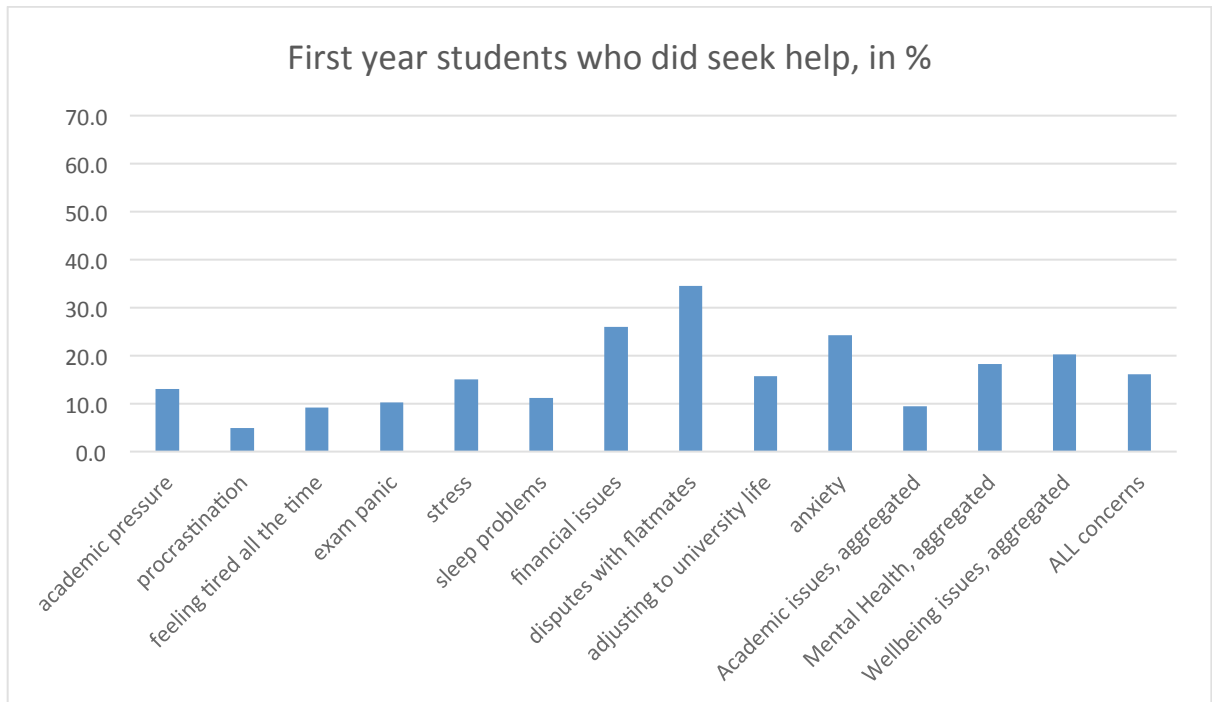
**Table 11 (Q4): First year students who did seek help**

Concern	Sought help, numbers		Sought help, %	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
academic pressure	23	153	13.1	86.9
procrastination	8	154	4.9	95.1
feeling tired all the time	10	99	9.2	90.8
exam panic	11	96	10.3	89.7
stress	16	91	15.0	85.0
sleep problems	11	87	11.2	88.8
financial issues	20	57	26.0	74.0
disputes with flatmates	19	36	34.5	65.5
adjusting to university life	8	43	15.7	84.3
anxiety	9	28	24.3	75.7
Academic issues, aggregated	44	425	9.4	90.6
Mental Health, aggregated	68	303	18.3	81.7
Wellbeing issues, aggregated	60	237	20.2	79.8
ALL concerns	196	1025	16.1	83.9

'Procrastination' and 'feeling tired all the time', on the other hand, score the lowest. It appears that the nature of these two concerns is such that it is very difficult to engage with students who need such type of support. Counselling and Academic Skill Centre routinely offer workshops on procrastination but number of students attending is very low. Feeling tired all the time is very much correlated with depression and, again, students appear not to seek support even though they need it. This means that student services need to come up with different approaches in dealing with these issues if they are to be tackled more efficiently. See Graph Q4



**Figure 17 (Q4): First year students who did seek help, in %**



**Sources of support for first year students**

Question Q5 breaks down the results from Q4 showing where did first year students seek support from [See Table 12 (Q5) and Figure 18 (Q5)]. Most did so from their advisors of studies, which indicates again that tutors and academic in general need not to be thought of a teachers only but have an important support role to play too. The second highest number of students sought support from their GP, followed by Student Support Worker and Peer support. All these sources of support achieve higher result than the category 'family', which clearly shows the decreasing role of the family in supporting the growing up young people. The low scores for Academic Skills Centre, Careers Services and Peer Connections comes as a surprise, as they all proactively engage with students.

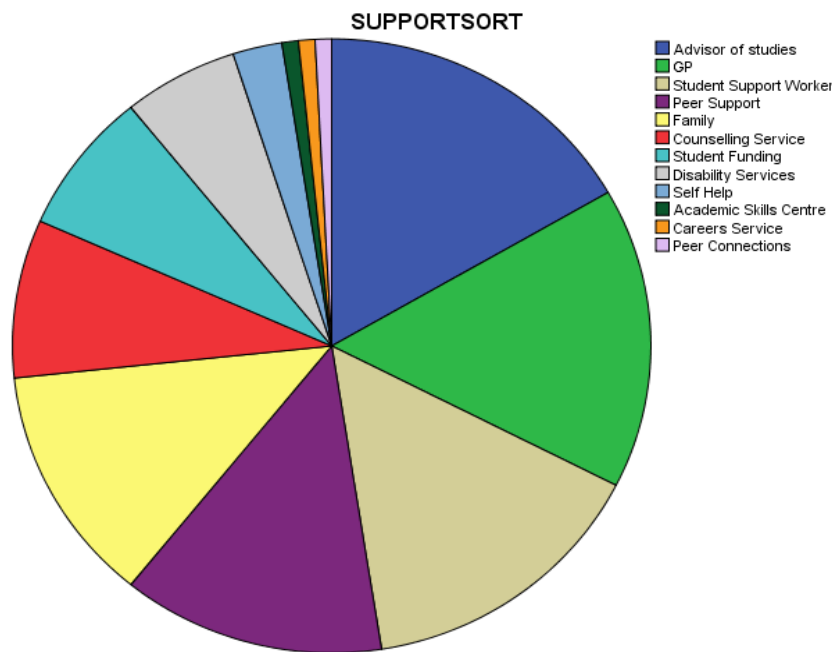
**Table 12 (Q5): If yes, what type of support did you seek?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Advisor of studies	20	5.2	16.7
	GP	19	4.9	32.5
	Student Support Worker	18	4.6	47.5
	Peer Support	16	4.1	60.8
	Family	15	3.9	73.3
	Counselling Service	10	2.6	81.7
	Student Funding	9	2.3	89.2
	Disability Services	7	1.8	95.0

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Self Help	3	.8	2.5	97.5
Academic Skills Centre	1	.3	.8	98.3
Careers Service	1	.3	.8	99.2
Peer Connections	1	.3	.8	100.0
Total	120	30.9	100.0	
Missing System	268	69.1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

Note: The responses to Question 5 are from a sample of available responses and not the full study group

Figure 18 (Q5): If yes, what type of support did you seek?



**Factors hindering support seeking**

A major issue for the support services, which negatively affects the students' experience is the fact that students who need support tend not to seek support. Table 13 (Q7) shows what are the most common reasons for this to happen.

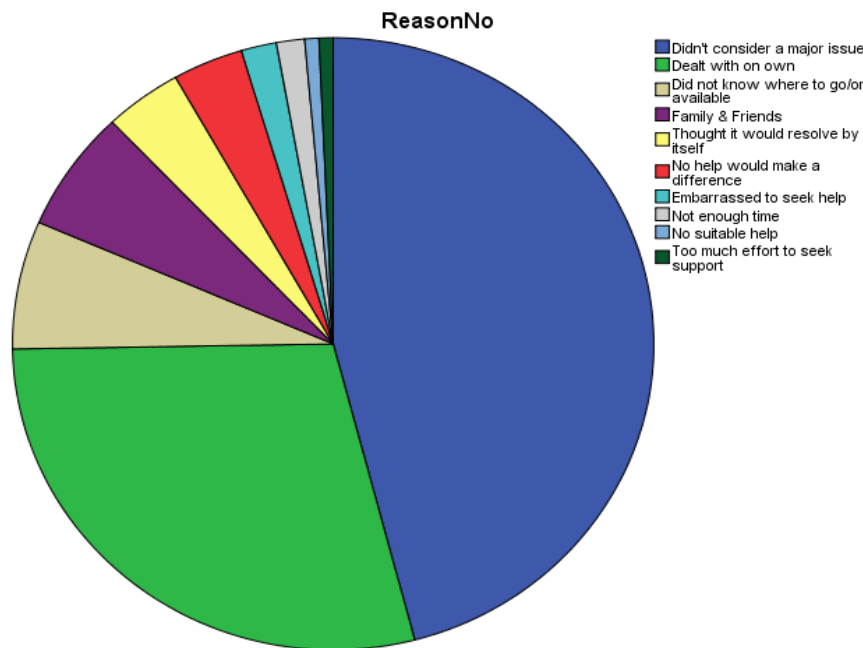
Table 13 (Q7): If no, why didn't you seek support?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Didn't consider a major issue	129	33.2	45.9
	Dealt with on own	81	20.9	74.7
	Did not know where to go/or available	19	4.9	81.5

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Family & Friends	18	4.6	6.4	87.9
Thought it would resolve by itself	11	2.8	3.9	91.8
No help would make a difference	10	2.6	3.6	95.4
Embarrassed to seek help	5	1.3	1.8	97.2
Not enough time	4	1.0	1.4	98.6
No suitable help	2	.5	.7	99.3
Too much effort to seek support	2	.5	.7	100.0
Total	281	72.4	100.0	
Missing 99	107	27.6		
<b>Total</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

This can also be seen from Figure 19 (Q7).

**Figure 19 (Q7): If no, why didn't you seek support?**



It is understandable that some issues are not severe and students do not feel the need to seek support. The level of the resilience of the students can also lead to this. The next largest category of issues was those with which students decided to deal with in their own. Although this is a positive indicator, there is a scope for input from student support services as more information can be provided to help students choose the best way to tackle the issues. Workshops on developing practical skills in this regard would also be helpful to students.

The third largest group of responses clearly indicates the need for more information regarding services that are available and for more promotional work by all the support units. This need is even more evident if we take in consideration the fifth largest category 'though it would resolve by itself'. There is an obvious denial about the problem and this need to be addressed by support services.

**Factors encouraging support seeking**

It is very interesting to see what factors most influence first year students to seek support [See Table 14 (Q8i) and Figure 20 (Q8i)]. It comes to no surprise that the severity of the problem is the main driving factor. The fact that their percentage is considerably higher than those of any of the other factors shows that a great majority of first year students have developed skills to live life independently and take the responsibility to look after themselves without too much relying on family.

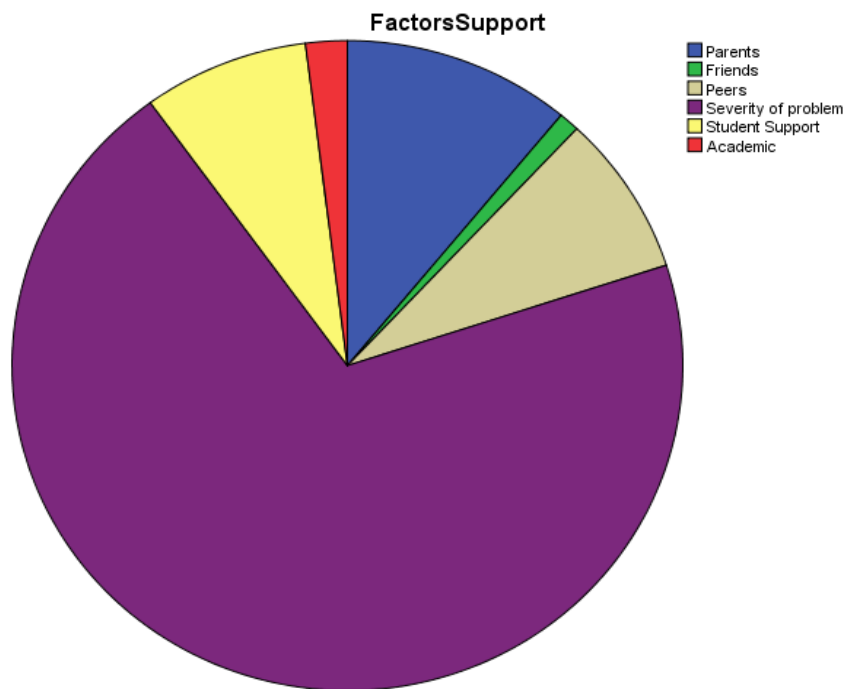
This is followed by 'parents', with 2.8 %, which shows that a number of first year students, though not as many as in the above category, still share issues with family and are happy to take advice from them. The categories 'peers' and 'student support' are next in line with 2.8 % of cases. This shows that peers play a significant and positive part in how first year students address their issues. It also shows that the pro-active approach taken by student support units has really been worth taking and has begun to pay off. The fact the student support is even within the same group as parents and peers speaks a lot about the success of the pro-active approach taken by the service.

Academic tutors are the last category that plays a role in the decision of the first year students to seek support when they have an issue. The fact that this is scores the least number of answers shows that there is much potential to develop co-operation between academic schools and student support. It also shows that there is unrealised potential to develop the role of the academic tutor in the direction to include caring and supporting elements, and not just concentrate in teaching and passing knowledge and academic skills to the student.

**Table 14 (Q8i): Which factors most influenced your decision to seek support?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Parents	11	2.8	11.0	11.0
	Friends	1	.3	1.0	12.0
	Peers	8	2.1	8.0	20.0
	Severity of problem	70	18.0	70.0	90.0
	Student Support	8	2.1	8.0	98.0
	Academic	2	.5	2.0	100.0
	Total	100	25.8	100.0	
Missing	99	288	74.2		
<b>Total</b>		<b>388</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

**Figure 20 (Q8i): Which factors most influenced your decision to seek support?**



**Factors discouraging support seeking**

What discourages first year students to seek support when they have a concern is important to understand as this information can guide student support managers in how to promote and develop their services [See Table 15 (Q8ii) and Figure 21 (Q8ii)].

The main factor here appears to be the intensity of the issue the student is experiencing. If they deem this as minor issue, they will not seek support – 45.5 %. An additional 29% reported that they have dealt with the issue on their own. This is understandable and probably, in most cases, the right way to go about it. However, if formal support is not sought, what is there for the student to rely on in addressing the issue? This question bring up the importance of availability of information on self-help and tool-kits where appropriate.

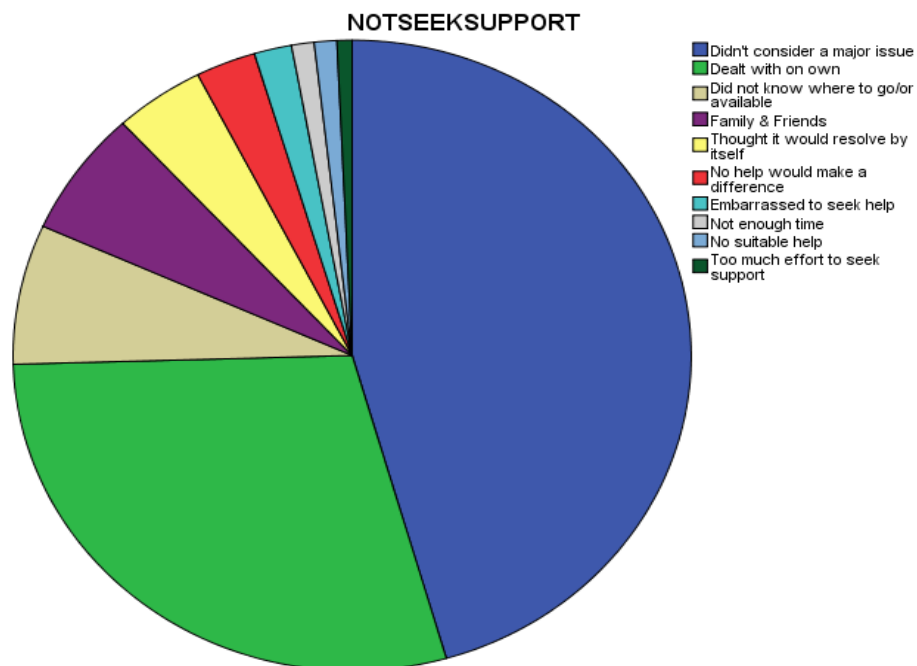
The importance of the availability of information about self-help, or rather the lack of it, is highlighted by the third largest result showing that 7.2 % of students did not know where to go for support or what support was available. Obviously, student support services need to address this finding by increasing the level of promotional activities and engaging with students through the appropriate information channels for them.

It is somehow disturbing that parents and/or friends discouraged students from seeking support on 6.5 % of cases. This result can be explained by lack of trust in the services, or perhaps by the possibility that parents/friends helped the student with the issue instead of encouraging them to seek formal support. Either way, this suggests that student services need to engage with parents as well in terms of raising awareness about the availability and quality of services.

**Table 15 (Q8ii): Which factors most influenced your decision not to seek support?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
Didn't consider a major issue	127	32.7	45.5	45.5
Dealt with on own	81	20.9	29.0	74.6
Did not know where to go/or available	20	5.2	7.2	81.7
Family & Friends	18	4.6	6.5	88.2
Thought it would resolve by itself	12	3.1	4.3	92.5
No help would make a difference	8	2.1	2.9	95.3
Embarrassed to seek help	5	1.3	1.8	97.1
Not enough time	3	.8	1.1	98.2
No suitable help	3	.8	1.1	99.3
Too much effort to seek support	2	.5	.7	100.0
Total	279	71.9	100.0	
Missing	99	109	28.1	
Total	388	100.0		

**Figure 21 (Q8ii): Which factors most influenced your decision not to seek support?**



### *Awareness of support services*

The results from Question 7 showed that there were a considerable number of students [6.8%, see Table 13 (Q7)] who did not know where to go for support or what support was available. The results from Question 9 show which units within Student Services are best recognised and which have still work to do to raise awareness about their services [See Table 16 (Q9)].

As it can be seen, Funding Unit has the highest result – 65%. This fact is even of higher importance if the recent awareness campaign undertaken by the Unit is taken into consideration. It only proves that the pro-active approach in offering services has many advantages. Other units, such as Residences Office, Student Support Worker, Career Services, Night Line, Enterprise Gym and Counselling Services also have a high recognition percent among students. Considering that the vast majority of students do not have a disability, the 43.2 % awareness about this particular service seems rather impressive.

The Enquiry Team, the International Advice and Nursery score the lowest. However, the Enquiry Team have been recently moved and share office with the receptions of Admissions and Registry. A new Enquiry Centre is currently under construction and this will undoubtedly change the level of awareness about the service as soon as the Centre is open. From that perspective, the 14.6 % awareness rate of a service that is still to have its first not-shared facility/office seems rather high. Similarly, in regard of the result of the International Advice, 19.9 %, it has to be taken into account that first year students show less demand for this service because their visas are not due to expire. Nursery on the other hand is only used by a limited number of students, so awareness of that service is not crucial.

However, as there are students who record that they are not aware of services or do not where to go for support, it is clear that all units, and indeed the students in general, would benefit from investing in promotional activities and making the initial approach to them as straight forward and easy as possible.

**Table 16 (Q9): Which support services are you aware of at the University of Dundee?**

Student Services Department/Units		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Services frequency Aware <sup>a</sup>	Academic Skills Centre	175	7.2%	46.4%
	Careers Service	231	9.5%	61.3%
	Counselling Service	193	8.0%	51.2%
	Disabilities Services	163	6.7%	43.2%
	Enquiry Team	55	2.3%	14.6%
	Enterprise Gym	209	8.6%	55.4%
	Health Service	156	6.4%	41.4%
	International Advice	75	3.1%	19.9%
Nightline	231	9.5%	61.3%	

Student Services Department/Units		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
	Nursery	101	4.2%	26.8%
	Peer Connections	109	4.5%	28.9%
	Residences Office	243	10.0%	64.5%
	Student Funding	245	10.1%	65.0%
	Student Support Worker	238	9.8%	63.1%
<b>Total</b>		<b>2424</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>643.0%</b>

*Desire for new support services*

Following from Q9 it is interesting to see what first year students would like to see as additional support services for them. Table 17 (Q10) shows just that [See also Figure 22 (Q10)]. It is not a big surprise that many of the entries are actually in existence. Obviously those who suggested them were not aware of the fact. This shows that more information about existing services needs to be published but also through the right channels, so it is picked by first year students and they make use of it. The opening of the new Enquiry Centre shall address this need to some extent and running more service specific campaigns would also be a step in the right direction.

It is also obvious that demand for existing services is high, hence the suggestion for expansion of existing services scores the second highest score. As this would be difficult to achieve in the current financial climate, it seems that the way to achieve this could be through increasing the efficiency of the services, which would eventually free some of their existing resources, which on the other hand could be employed towards expansion.

Three of the proposed entries stick up as relatively new. These are the idea about Student Support Induction, the introduction of the General Advisor role and demand for Funding for international students. Student Support is promoted but this is done more in way of raising awareness and making information available. An induction event would be a step forward and clearly there is demand for it with 22 % responses scored.

The role of general advisor can also be introduced, either by being taken by the staff in the new Enquiry centre, or by the staff of the Student Pastoral Support Unit, or by both. This matches well with the move in providing student support at a peer level, general level and specialised level.

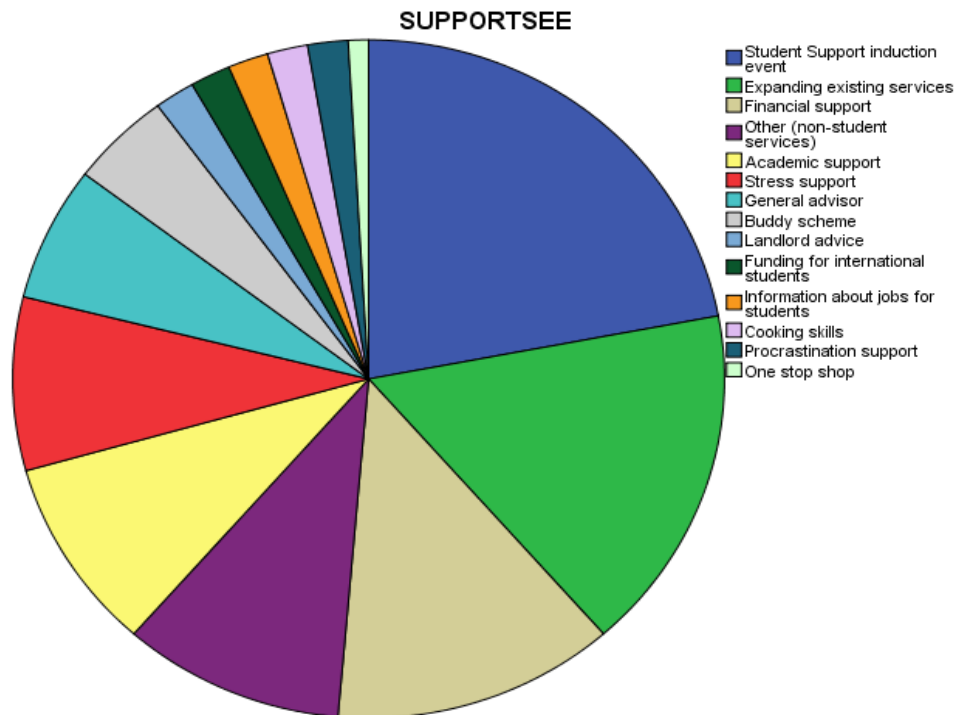
More difficult is to deliver tangible result in the direction of funding for international students, especially due to the current UKBA regulations. However, as many international students graduate and move on in life, potentially some of them could become benefactors supporting financially international students. This would suggest first steps being taken by the Alumni Fund and then perhaps the funds made available could be managed by the Funding Unit.



**Table 17 (Q 10): What types of support services would you like to see in place at the University of Dundee?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Student Support induction event	24	6.2	22.0	22.0
	Expanding existing services	18	4.6	16.5	38.5
	Financial support	14	3.6	12.8	51.4
	Other (non-student services)	11	2.8	10.1	61.5
	Academic support	10	2.6	9.2	70.6
	Stress support	9	2.3	8.3	78.9
	General advisor	7	1.8	6.4	85.3
	Buddy scheme	5	1.3	4.6	89.9
	Landlord advice	2	.5	1.8	91.7
	Funding for international students	2	.5	1.8	93.6
	Information about jobs for students	2	.5	1.8	95.4
	Cooking skills	2	.5	1.8	97.2
	Procrastination support	2	.5	1.8	99.1
	One stop shop	1	.3	.9	100.0
	Total	109	28.1	100.0	
Missing	99	279	71.9		
<b>Total</b>		<b>388</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

**Figure 22 (Q10): What types of support services would you like to see in place?**



### Summary of focus groups discussions

#### Research Question 4: How Student Support Services are addressing the concerns that first year students have?

The results from the Focus Groups discussions with staff of the Student Services Departments/Units present what they are doing to address the concerns of students, including providing information, prevention, and specialised help. This is the collated summary of the focus group meetings.

#### *Q1. Have you noticed that students need different types of support?*

All units within Student Services recognised that students do need different types of support, as individuals. It also depends on the time of year and the course the student is doing. Disabled students may also require some very specific support depending on their needs.

#### *Q2. Which types of support do students seek from your unit (most/least)?*

The type of support students seek varies depending on the unit.

Support for crisis is a common theme – these may be categorised as issues relating to academic work, family or personal circumstances or financial issues.

Units provide a wide range of support, counselling, advice, coaching and workshops. Support is given reactively (response to crisis) or proactively (plans, workshops, coaching)

Difficult to ascertain from data gathered what were the most common and least common types of support. Response probably relates to most common.

***Q3. When do they seek each type of support?***

More students seek support during semester. Most units reported little variation in the use of the service through the year. Some units because of the work that they are engaged in reported slightly busier periods relating to particular needs of students – e.g. visa extensions, exam periods or transition. Units also noted that many students do not seek support until the last minute when they are at crisis point.

Mitigation letters were often asked for at the end of semesters or exam resit periods.

***Q4. Are you aware of the types of support offered by Student Services?***

All units were well aware of the support offered by other units within Student Services. Regular updates from other units and opportunities for staff to meet and network more informally were seen as beneficial for building relationships and knowledge of developments/ work within other units.

***Q5. Please indicate which services you have heard of?***

All units said that they were aware of all Student Services units.

***Q6. Have you referred students to any of these services?***

All units had made referrals to other student services units – though some referred to all other units. Some only referred to specific units. Referrals were also made to the academic schools and the student's GP.

***Q7. Have you received students that you have been unable to help?***

Most units stated that they were able to help the students, some recognised that students required specialist help and referred the student to this internally or externally. Units stated that they were not able to help students sometimes because there service was not the appropriate support for the student. Students were always helped to access appropriate supports as required.

***Q8. Why were you not able to help them?***

Services cannot always resolve issues for students – they can only help by offering support by listening or being available to them. There is a limitation on some services about the length of support that can be provided e.g. Counselling Service. There may also be limitations on the service that can be provided for a student if the issue is temporary e.g. Disability Services. If the issue relates to an area that we are legally unable to respond to e.g. advice about private accommodation. Units also recognize that there are limitations on what support they can provide and will refer students to specialised support either within the university or to external sources of support e.g. Citizens' Advice Bureau or GP.

***Q9. What steps have you taken to provide support for these students in the last 12 months?***

Units have identified resources or requested more staff cover. They have also referred students to internal or external supports. They have ensured that students are followed up and have actually accessed the suggested support. Students who have withdrawn are identified so that other clients can be taken on e.g. Mental Health Unit.

***Q10. What positive changes to student welfare have you implemented in the last 12 months?***

Units have developed many positive changes to student welfare in the past 12 months these include:

New online toolkits for students; changes to workshops or course provision; changes to working practices to streamline and make more effective for students; implementation of additional monitoring and recording progress; training opportunities for staff within and out with Student Services; increased provision for students; recruitment of additional staff; development of university wide policies; increased social opportunities for students and improvements to the Welcome programme; work with other agencies e.g. NHS Tayside, DUSA; work with academic schools.

***Q11. What negative changes to student welfare have you noticed in the last 12 months?***

Almost all units mentioned budgetary restraint – lack of resource and more being demanded of staff consequent reduction in the service available to students. The increasing complexity of student's issues. Issues relating to referral within the directorate. External political and financial climate impacting on students e.g. "bedroom tax", parental financial constraints, child care costs. Increase in parental demands on services and interference with the service's ability to deal with issues which have arisen. Students having issues with online gambling addiction. Issues relating to academic schools' approach to disabled students leading to inconsistencies and unhelpful practices.

***Q12. Have you received any recommendations for your service from students/staff?***

All units report recommendations from students or staff, all units engage in some sort of review or evaluation process in a variety of formats – online questionnaires, feedback forms, emails and verbal feedback. Some of recommendations have already been implemented, some require further work to be done, a few require extra resource that may not be readily available due to budget constraints. Units have clearly tried to implement changes that can be made within available resourcing. For instance some new staff have been recruited e.g. English language support, Enquiry Team; changes have been made to reduce technical problems e.g. stronger Wifi signal in Disability IT suite; revision of academic processes e.g. dyslexia marking. Availability of peer connectors – Drop In to be re-established in library.

Waiting times for mental health are too long. Improvements to availability of appointments and the waiting room for Counselling.

Units report that students are satisfied with services but there is still scope for improvements, some minor changes to practice or things which improve service experience.

**Q 13. What factors do you think increase student welfare?**

**Recruitment/ Guidance Factors:** Students admitted to the university are clear about their course choice and are given appropriate guidance about this. Clarifying learning objectives/teaching and assessment requirements in programme recruitment information and throughout the AY

**Personal Factors for student:** Life skills, problem solving, budgeting

Students being ready for university life – personal resilience, maturity and ability to self-motivate. Students' attitude about contacting support services or academic departments. Students' awareness of support services.

**Academic Factors:** Advising students of the name and contact details of their personal tutors/DSOs/other key contacts and ensuring these are up-to-date. Providing flexibility, where reasonable, in teaching and assessment methods to accommodate diverse learning needs. Providing teaching/publicity materials in accessible formats and using accessible templates

Staff are the gate keepers. Working with the schools – tutors are huge potential. Ability of academic schools to respond and refer students to appropriate sources of support. Students actively engaging with their academic departments.

**Support Staff (SS and Academic):**

Request and respond to student feedback on a regular basis.

Providing training for staff in supporting students with diverse learning needs and learning styles. Appropriate crisis response and adequately trained personnel who can deal with this.

Appropriate crisis management planning and policies in place.

**Accessibility of Support Services:**

Providing frequent reminders/repeated opportunities to engage with support services throughout the academic year and at key points, such as before exams. Prompt appropriate assistance quick assistance when required, direct from the appropriate service without having to go through too many people to get there. Adequate provision of general student pastoral support services with easy accessibility to the support provision both during usual working hours and out with as required.

Students engaging with support services before situations escalate. Accessibility and adequate provision of specialist services within the university – this includes the waiting time to be seen by specialist services and the availability of these services. Provision of peer support including mentoring. Ability of Student Services units to refer to other units.

**Information Giving:** Awareness and publicity of services. Giving the right information to students. Accurate information on how to look after their general health. Information given appropriately to families about support services for students prior to admission. Support for students provided in University accommodation. Availability of information and resources to aid self-help for students.

**Practical Factors:** Helping people pay the rent and buy food - students having adequate income to live on. Students are accommodated in suitable, well maintained, safe, warm property.

*Q14. What factors do you think decrease student welfare?*

**Staffing Issues -Staffing (reduction)** – less ability to respond to students in a timely manner. Inability of student to access academic support when required, e.g. academics not available suggested that a university policy on this is needed about this. Lack of team working within Student Services – units do not always co-ordinate their efforts and referral to University Health service for Mental Health needs to go through a GP which can sometimes be a difficulty if you are aware that the student has issues but they will not see a GP.

**Resource Issues** - Lack of resources. Lack of staff availability. It would be beneficial in terms assigning responsibilities and requiring results if Student Support Assistants are recruited on a paid basis rather than on a volunteering basis.

**Practice** - Inflexible practices that do not anticipate the needs of disabled students create barriers to access and can lead to additional stress, anxiety etc. and ultimately impact on retention. Disempowerment – if we take things away from them, decision-making etc. Lack of personal contact, potential for disengagement – tendency for it all now to be on-line. Sometimes delays in accessing appropriate services, conflicting information can be given from different services. Increased waiting times for students to be seen. Lack of support for assistive technologies. Inclusiveness of student not always as fully supported as it should be. Not being able to assist students with concerns relating to finding private accommodation. Generalising about students and thinking that only a few student have issues. Lack of cultural understanding and the social needs of all students being catered for rather than those who want to drink/party – can lead to isolation. Duplication of effort and students being “bounced around” too many people to resolve their issue.

**Student's Response to issue** – some will not tackle issue and adopt a “Head in the sand” reaction. Others leave things to the last moment. Students not engaging with their academic departments or support services. Students can feel there is a stigma attached to the issues facing them. Often anxiety about finance.

**Social Areas** - Lack of informal social space on campus – university residences have little in the way of common rooms, there are few places to sit, talk or chat outside or inside on campus, space is only devoted to learning/ teaching or administrative space other than places where food/ drinks are sold commercially. There is a great need for other types of spaces where social or even academic discourse can take place.

***Q15. What changes would you like to see take place within student services to increase student welfare?***

Most units mentioned the new Enquiry Centre being a key aspect of change within Student Services which will enhance student welfare. Some felt that once this was implemented it would be worthwhile waiting for this to bed in before implementing further changes. Referral routes and protocols between units need to be sorted out for clarity and to enable quicker easier referrals to improve service delivery. Students need to be clearly placed at the centre of all that we do and we should not lose sight of students as individuals even though we are catering for the mass. Improvements in awareness within the student body (marketing) and communication between teams about what is communicated is essential. Case handover – and potential for case conferences if more than one service is involved – with consent of student. A more accessible base for Peer Connections drop-in support.

***Q16. What level of support do you provide for students in the first six weeks of the academic year?***

Some units report little difference from other times of the year. Units which are actively involved in delivery of Welcome events and related activities are very busy with this during 1<sup>st</sup> 6 weeks. Some staff engage with academic departments to deliver talks to students to raise awareness of services. The level of support provided by Disability is the same throughout the academic year and depends on students' individual needs. Some students are in contact with them long before they arrive as all applicants who disclose a disability are automatically advised to contact that service. Some also make contact prior to application, particularly those with complex support needs. The nature of the support we provide may vary throughout the year with a focus prior to arrival/in the first semester on needs assessment arranging support, sharing adjustments with Schools etc. Training with assistive software and specialist study skills support tends to be provided once students start to receive assignment requirements although training for some students with complex needs will be arranged prior to starting their course where feasible.

Support varies throughout the year. However, high level of cover required.

***Q17. What level of support do you provide for students in the first semester?***

Most units report similar level of support throughout semester. Some like Pastoral Support report a slight tapering off towards Christmas break. More workshops and individual help need to be given for stress management. Later in semester more issues with stress and isolation become apparent. Within Disability, students may also present with specific concerns during the academic year e.g. prior to examination periods, difficulty with academic requirements (leading to dyslexia screening request) etc.

***Q18. What level of support do you provide for students in the second semester?***

Most units report similar level of support throughout semester. Health has reduced hours during vacation periods. International Advice provides more immigration advice and visa extension, Schengen visa and also Family visit visas and visas for

graduation later in second semester. Pastoral Support has fewer Welcome events in January Welcome but continues with other support.

***Q19. What level of support do you provide for students throughout the academic year?***

Most units report similar level of support throughout semester. Health and Counselling have reduced hours during vacation periods. International Advice continues to provide more immigration advice and visa extension, Schengen visa and also Family visit visas and visas for graduation later in second semester. Pastoral Support continues to offer general support and Peer Support – same as in both semesters – reduced staff cover in vacation periods – but always one staff member available. Peer Support not always available in vacation periods.

***Q20. Do you run collaborative projects with other support services?***

ASC and Counselling run “Procrastination” Workshops for students. Units have contributed to each other’s projects or Student Services fairs and the Welcome events/ activities. Health and Disability are working on the creation of a Mental Health Resource.

***Q21. Do you run collaborative projects with other schools or colleges?***

There are several collaborative projects which Student Services units have run or are running with academic departments including: Stay on Course (See Appendix 5-1 and Appendix 5-2), Summer School, SafeTALK in Medical School, presentations to students during induction, STI project between Health and DUSA, Disability have the largest number of collaborations including : Inclusive practice award/showcase with LLC; Alternative Formats Service with University of Dundee IT and LLC; DisabledGo project with Estates; Development of policy and guidance in liaison with QA, LLC, HR, Safety Services; DSOs in Academic Schools and requests .for research. Welcome Week is collaborative project between academic schools, Student Services units (especially Pastoral Support and Enquiry Team), LLC, DUSA, ISE and Estates and Buildings.

***Q22. Would student services benefit from further collaborations?***

The units were clear that they considered such collaborations positive, enhancing what could be done and improving student experience. Some made suggestions for future collaborations such as joint training/ workshops. Further work with students in schools or those articulating from colleges – collaborative work with the new Transitions Officer. More engagement with academic schools and adviser of studies. It was felt that each unit had its own strengths as well.

***Q23. What types of collaborative projects would you like to see?***

A variety of suggestions were made:

**Transition:** Further collaboration with Secondary Schools and FE Colleges to ensure smoother transition to University for disabled students, including raising awareness of the support available in each sector.



**Training / Workshops/Toolkits:** Events that staff member could attend, e.g. – staff taster sessions including Procrastination workshops. Resilience sessions with academic schools. Student's toolkit type project for students to utilise aspects of units already developed – Stress management and procrastination workshops, suicide prevention training. Allowing for student self-help. Look at how we build resilience in students and how we can enhance this collaboratively. Utilise student volunteers to be trained to help deliver sessions for other students. . Stress management workshops for medical students.

**Academic developments:** Enterprise module – with careers. FA college of PASS module

**Collaboration with new Enquiry Centre:** Working with new Enquiry Centre staff to ensure greatest understanding on which health services to signpost to in the first instance. This would reduce student journey, with most appropriate service accessed first time hence improving student welfare and experience; Collaboration with Enquiry Centre to ensure students are referred appropriately and support is in place and followed up.

**Peer Connections initiatives:** Café Conversations for International Students – hosted by Peer Connectors and jointly promoted by ASC English Language support also Peer Connections Drop In within in the main library in conjunction with LLC.

#### *Q24. How could your unit benefit from these projects?*

Pre-sessional support for international students to help them socialise and integrate. More pro-active work than re-active. Will be more effective volume wise. Less numbers needing counselling. Appropriate signposting to our service would allow timely treatment with no delays thus reducing possible numbers of appointments required, reducing the waiting time for appointments. Collaboration with the Enquiry Centre will streamline the route to support for students – the location of the Enquiry Centre will especially aid this as it likely to be well used by students. Proactive approaches like the toolkit will reduce the need for reactive element of work and free up time for other work / planning to happen. Potential to share good practice, internally and externally. Availability of new training or resources for staff/ students. Collaboration helps budget spend as DUSA can help to buy materials.

#### *Q25. How might other units' benefits from these projects?*

There is a lot of potential to share good practice. More effective resource use and joined up working may lead to more appropriate referrals and online resources could reduce some demands on units. Referral waiting times would be less. Reduce any confusion as to which service is accessed when More pro-active work than re-active. It will be more effective volume wise

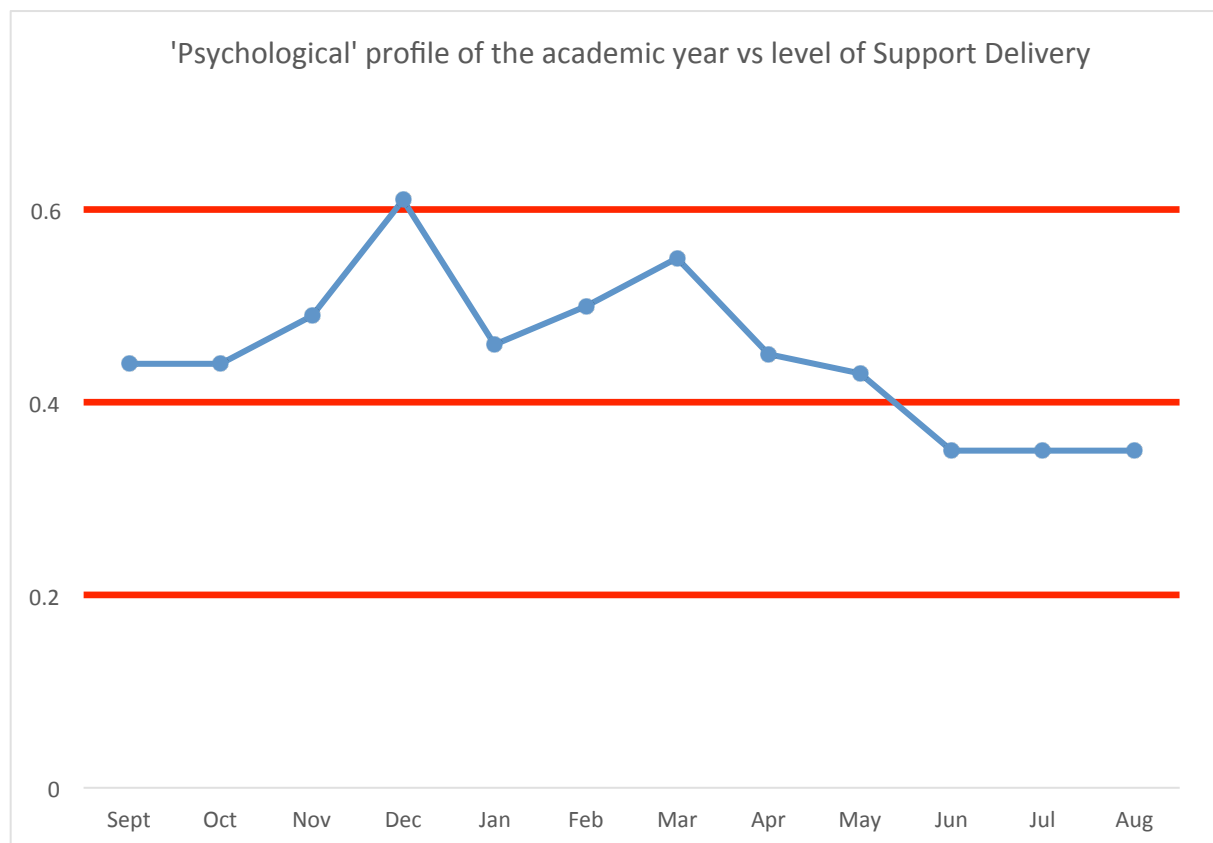
If students are more resilient there should be less pressure on student services as a whole.

#### **Summary of focus groups discussion findings**

Student Support Services recognise that students need different types of support at different periods of the year but most of them report little variation in the use of

their services throughout the year (See Q1 and Q3). Most units report that the demand for their services remain unaffected during the first 6 weeks of the academic year, the first semester, the second semester and for the duration for the entire academic year (See Q 16, Q 17, Q 18 and Q 19). This can be due to low level of available resources, so as demand always remain too high, this does not affect the level of service delivery. For example, if resources are too restricted and the support available to students is at the 0.2 level in Figure 23, then any drop for demand for support will not affect the particular student support service as they would have been working at the top of their capacity throughout the year. If, on the other hand, the student support services operate at level 0.6 in Figure 23, they will always be underused, as demand for their services will be below their full potential most of the time. Some support services, however, report that there is a drop of demand for their services during the summer. This means that they most likely operate at level 0.4 in the Figure 23, overstretched during academic year and less so during summer. Summer is the time when most support staff are on annual leave and this allows the unites to be operating close to potential with support activities and planning for next academic year.

**Figure 23: 'Psychological' profile of the academic year vs level Support Delivery**



This is confirmed by the fact that some services report too much 'firefighting' and not enough time/resources to work on prevention and building up resilience within student population (See Q2). Hence, there is an apparent need to rebalance service delivery towards more proactive work and less reactive work, and also towards more information giving and advice on self-help (tool kits etc.)

Student Support Services are well aware of what other support services do but they also recognise that there is no established system of co-operation between units that can maximise their potential to work together, including unclear or missing points of referrals, units working in isolation from one another, lack of clear policy on student cases follow-up and monitoring etc. (See Q 4, Q 5, Q6 and Q 15). Although all units report that they do refer students to other units as appropriate, this is either upwards toward more specialised help or downwards toward general help and peer support. Apart from the Stay-on-course initiative, there is no other formal policy or process that allows student centred approach in providing support.

There are initiatives for running co-operative projects within Student Support Services and between Student Support Services and other departments within the university but they appear random and no common theme can be seen to unite them (See Q 20, Q 21 and Q 22). Student Support Services recognise the usefulness of external to university services, such as GP and mutual support groups for different issues, but there is still potential to be realised for their fuller use. All this highlights again the need for placing the student at the centre of the support and replacing competition with co-operation between Student Support Services.

Developing and maintenance of self-help tool kits by a number of units is seen as a very positive and proactive response to the increased demand for support services. Work toward streamlining of services' access and services' delivery also contributes to this.

Almost all Student Support Services recognise the apparent gap in providing students with enough information, advice and guidance toward available support and very much welcome the imminent opening of the new Enquiry Centre (See Q 13). They anticipate a very significant and positive change in regard of shortening the student journey to appropriate support and allowing them to concentrate more on their specific work.

Most Student Support Services recognise the need for engaging with students to help them build life skills, such as problem solving, maturity, ability to self-motivate, budgeting etc. They anticipate that the resulting increased resilience of students would both decrease demand for specialised services but will also have a very positive effect on student experience.

There is awareness among some Student Support Services that academic staff, mostly tutors, have the potential to transform the student experience (See Q 13). They see that if the roles of the academic tutors are further developed to include student support elements this would enormously benefit the student in more than one way. Firstly, this will allow student issues to be picked up as soon as they arise, hence the chance for these to be properly addressed and resolved would be much higher. Secondly, this would allow the co-operation between academics and SSS to be developed along the Stay-on-course procedure and structure (See Appendix 5-1 and Appendix 5-2), hence a much higher level of co-operation could be achieved.

Student Support Services are aware that the level of team working within the Student Services directorate needs to increase and that co-operation between them is not as high as it could be (See Q 14). There is also a concern regarding the limited

availability of support during out-of-hours times. This may be potentially addressed by enhancing the role of the Night Line to include connecting the student to the appropriate Student Support Services, with their consent.

Student Support Services recognise the fact that students often do not seek support, adopt 'head-in-the-sand' reaction and leave to act on concerns to the very last moment, when it is already at a crisis level. Many predominantly rely on on-line information and support, which is underdeveloped within the institution. It is also acknowledged that some practices lead to disempowerment and take decision making away from the student, which discourages them to remain engaged and reduces the effectiveness of the support.

Student Support Services are currently working on a considerable number of collaborative projects, both within SS directorate and outwith the directorate. Much is expected from these in terms of enhanced services, increased effectiveness and student satisfaction (See Q 23, Q 24 and Q 25).

## Summary of recommendations

The 'Psychological' profile of the academic year shows that there is a pattern of how different concerns change in intensity during the months of the academic year but the activities of the Student Support Services do not always follow it. Table 18 has information on possible actions by support services to address the top ten concerns that first year students have and the timings that would be most useful to students.

**Table 18: Timings when specific actions by Student Support Services are most needed**

Timings when specific actions by Student Support Services are most needed	S E P T	O C T	N O V	D E C	J A N	F E B	M A R	A P R	M A Y	J U N	J U L	A U G
<b>Academic pressures</b>												
1. Information regarding what students can expect in terms for what kind of academic work is required and when etc. to reduce anxiety.	√										√	√
2. Information on academic support available to show to new students that they are not on their own and support is available.	√	√									√	√
3. Information on support with developing academic skills	√	√	√									
4. Providing academic skills support	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
5. Early information on when are the exams		√										
6. Information about the role of the advisor of studies	√	√										
7. Information how to find academic support	√	√									√	√
<b>Procrastination</b>												
1. Raising awareness of its effects and of the severity of the	√	√	√									

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Timings when specific actions by Student Support Services are most needed	S E P T	O C T	N O V	D E C	J A N	F E B	M A R	A P R	M A Y	J U N	J U L	A U G
issue												
2. Information on self-help and coping strategies											√	√
3. Providing workshops	√	√	√									
4. Information regarding the connection between procrastination and perfectionism	√	√									√	√
<b>Feeling tired all the time</b>												
1. GP check		√										
2. Advice about diet		√										
3. Light therapy				√	√	√						
4. Advice on energy level balance	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
5. Information on coping strategies		√	√	√								
<b>Exam panic</b>												
1. Providing specific information on what is to be expected about each exam			√				√					
2. Offering the chance to sit mock exams		√	√			√	√					
3. Information on coping with panic attacks		√	√			√	√					
<b>Stress</b>												
1. Information on coping with stress		√	√	√			√	√				
2. Advice on physical exercise for stress reduction	√	√	√									
3. Stress reduction workshops/courses		√	√	√			√	√				
<b>Sleep problems</b>												
1. Information on coping strategies		√	√									
2. Check by GP			√	√								
3. Addressing noise issues in accommodation		√	√	√			√	√	√			
<b>Financial issues</b>												
1. Information on student expenses, itemised	√	√									√	√
2. Advice on reducing expenses	√	√	√			√	√					
3. Advice on budgeting	√	√	√			√	√					
4. Information on sources of funding	√	√									√	√
5. Information on sources of income	√	√	√		√	√						
6. Financial support	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
<b>Disputes with flat-mates</b>												
1. Advice on avoiding and overcoming flat disputes	√	√	√									
2. Addressing flat disputes by support services		√	√	√		√	√					
3. Advice on setting up flat rules and boundaries	√	√				√						

Timings when specific actions by Student Support Services are most needed	S E P T	O C T	N O V	D E C	J A N	F E B	M A R	A P R	M A Y	J U N	J U L	A U G
<b>Adjusting to university life</b>												
1. Information on activities, sports, student association etc.	√	√									√	√
2. Advice on coping with homesickness	√	√	√		√	√						
3. Peer support	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
<b>Anxiety</b>												
1. Information regarding the academic and social calendar of the year	√	√	√									√
2. Advice on coping with anxiety	√	√	√			√	√					
3. Consultation with GP		√	√	√			√	√				
4. Support for anxiety	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

Suggested actions by Student Support Services to address aggregated concerns of first year students:

#### Academic issues

- pre-session engagement to raise awareness, to tackle anxiety and academic pressure – on-line information and general advice
- early workshops for most challenging issues, such as procrastination
- academic tutors – programme to raise their awareness about support needs of students and engaging with them directly or through schools

#### Mental health issues

- an annual programme to build up resilience among students, consisting of workshops, discussion groups, mutual support groups etc.
- developing a policy on referrals, agreed by all units, including to external providers such as GP/A&E/Police

#### Wellbeing issues

- quick reaction of Student Support services to resolve issues before they reach a crisis level – resources to be redirected to reach a balance between prevention, self-help and information/advice and formal support
- developing a wellbeing tool kit

Student Support Services overarching strategies to address the 'Psychological' profile of the academic year:

- Pre-session on-line induction for student services
- Developing an Enquiry Centre to address the need for information and advice on all issues relating to student support
- Student Support Induction event, twice in 1<sup>st</sup> semester – during Welcome week and during Reading week
- Developing sets of tool kits for self-help regarding common concerns among students, as appropriate

- Further rebalancing of student support provision toward more pro-active approach
- 'Stay-on-course' to extend to tutors by raising awareness of available support services and enhancing their role from teaching only into teaching/supporting

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# Appendix 1

## Psychological' profile of an academic year - Appendix 1

Common concerns for students based in university accommodation during the 2013 - 14 academic year.

**Table 1.1**

Common concerns	numbers	in %	numbers	in %	numbers	in %	numbers	in %	numbers	in %	numbers	in %	numbers	in %
	Sept		Oct		Nov		Feb		Mar		Apr		average	average
Academic pressures	323	13.3	267	15.0	357	16.6	228	12.6	260	14.7	148	15.6	264	14.6
Addiction (incl. to computer games)	30	1.2	28	1.6	26	1.2	33	1.8	24	1.4	8	0.8	25	1.3
Adjusting to university life	217	8.9	59	3.3	40	1.9	22	1.2	18	1.0	8	0.8	61	2.9
Alcohol abuse	18	0.7	14	0.8	16	0.7	21	1.2	23	1.3	12	1.3	17	1.0
Anger issues	11	0.5	5	0.3	16	0.7	16	0.9	21	1.2	12	1.3	14	0.8
Anxiety	101	4.2	70	3.9	84	3.9	70	3.9	75	4.2	51	5.4	75	4.2
Asperger (ASD)	3	0.1	4	0.2	5	0.2	3	0.2	6	0.3	2	0.2	4	0.2
Bereavement, grief and loss	16	0.7	7	0.4	19	0.9	14	0.8	13	0.7	3	0.3	12	0.6
Bullying	9	0.4	6	0.3	6	0.3	17	0.9	13	0.7	2	0.2	9	0.5
Depression	59	2.4	43	2.4	36	1.7	47	2.6	33	1.9	27	2.8	41	2.3
Disputes with flat-mates	57	2.3	32	1.8	36	1.7	30	1.7	45	2.5	23	2.4	37	2.1
Eating disorders	28	1.2	26	1.5	17	0.8	20	1.1	19	1.1	17	1.8	21	1.2
Exam panic	160	6.6	98	5.5	193	9.0	96	5.3	155	8.8	118	12.4	137	7.9

AMOSHE Insight: 'Psychological' profile of an academic year

Common concerns	numbers	in %	numbers	in %	numbers	in %	numbers	in %	numbers	in %	numbers	in %	numbers	in %
	Sept		Oct		Nov		Feb		Mar		Apr		average	average
Feeling tired all the time	223	9.2	201	11.3	251	11.7	211	11.7	162	9.2	74	7.8	187	10.1
Financial issues	148	6.1	99	5.6	103	4.8	118	6.5	83	4.7	38	4.0	98	5.3
Harassment	7	0.3	2	0.1	8	0.4	3	0.2	8	0.5	4	0.4	5	0.3
Living alongside mental illness	10	0.4	11	0.6	10	0.5	10	0.6	13	0.7	5	0.5	10	0.6
Landlord issues	8	0.3	3	0.2	7	0.3	11	0.6	9	0.5	4	0.4	7	0.4
Loneliness	94	3.9	39	2.2	38	1.8	36	2.0	34	1.9	20	2.1	44	2.3
Low mood, mood swings	73	3.0	54	3.0	55	2.6	57	3.2	57	3.2	26	2.7	54	3.0
Low self-esteem	59	2.4	33	1.9	44	2.0	39	2.2	31	1.8	19	2.0	38	2.0
Mania and bipolar disorders	7	0.3	5	0.3	2	0.1	2	0.1	7	0.4	1	0.1	4	0.2
Panic attacks	36	1.5	27	1.5	20	0.9	17	0.9	20	1.1	17	1.8	23	1.3
Perfectionism	85	3.5	68	3.8	68	3.2	77	4.3	65	3.7	26	2.7	65	3.5
Procrastination	218	9.0	206	11.6	259	12.0	223	12.3	193	10.9	86	9.1	198	10.8
Relationships	61	2.5	49	2.8	45	2.1	28	1.5	41	2.3	22	2.3	41	2.3
Schizophrenia	2	0.1	7	0.4	2	0.1	3	0.2	5	0.3	0	0.0	3	0.2
Self-harm	16	0.7	10	0.6	10	0.5	8	0.4	8	0.5	1	0.1	9	0.4
Sexuality	14	0.6	8	0.4	4	0.2	10	0.6	14	0.8	4	0.4	9	0.5
Sleep problems	129	5.3	130	7.3	159	7.4	163	9.0	144	8.1	61	6.4	131	7.3
Stress	190	7.8	148	8.3	196	9.1	157	8.7	148	8.4	102	10.8	157	8.8
Suicidal thoughts	4	0.2	8	0.4	10	0.5	7	0.4	8	0.5	4	0.4	7	0.4
Trauma	1	0.0	3	0.2	3	0.1	3	0.2	5	0.3	0	0.0	3	0.1
Withdrawal	10	0.4	9	0.5	7	0.3	9	0.5	9	0.5	3	0.3	8	0.4
	2427	100.0	1779	100.0	2152	100.0	1809	100.0	1769	100.0	948	100.0	1814	100.0

Common concerns	numbers	in %	numbers	in %	numbers	in %	numbers	in %	numbers	in %	numbers	in %	numbers	in %
	Sept		Oct		Nov		Feb		Mar		Apr		average	average
forms filled	620	72.4	546	72.6	682	76.3	559	68.6	551	69.7	260	69.3	536	71.5
forms blank	236	27.6	209	27.8	203	22.7	256	31.4	240	30.3	111	30.7	209	28.4
total forms issued	856	55.3	752	48.6	894	57.8	815	52.7	791	51.1	371	21.3	747	47.8
total numer of beds	1547		1547		1547		1547		1547		1547		1547	

## Appendix 2

The study has delivered information on the comparative weight of each of the 34 common concerns studied and these results are shown in Table Q1 below. The results from the answers to this question shows that the top concerns for first year students are Academic pressure with 55 %, Procrastination with 53.5 %, Feeling tired all the time with 39.1 %, Stress with 36 % and Exam panic with 34 %.

**Table Q1: Which concerns were you faced with?**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Concern frequency of response <sup>a</sup>	Academic pressures	194	12.9%	55.0%
	Addiction (incl. computer games)	18	1.2%	5.1%
	Adjusting to university life	75	5.0%	21.2%
	Alcohol abuse	15	1.0%	4.2%
	Anger issues	8	0.5%	2.3%
	Anxiety	55	3.7%	15.6%
	Asperger (ASD)	1	0.1%	0.3%
	Bereavement, grief and loss	11	0.7%	3.1%
	Bullying	4	0.3%	1.1%
	Depression	41	2.7%	11.6%
	Disputes with flat mates	68	4.5%	19.3%
	Eating disorders	13	0.9%	3.7%
	Exam panic	120	8.0%	34.0%
	Feeling tired all the time	138	9.2%	39.1%
	Financial issues	88	5.9%	24.9%
	Harassment	1	0.1%	0.3%
	Living alongside mental illness	10	0.7%	2.8%
	Landlord issues	8	0.5%	2.3%
	Loneliness	34	2.3%	9.6%
	Low mood, mood swings	35	2.3%	9.9%
	Low self-esteem	31	2.1%	8.8%
	Mania and bipolar disorders	3	0.2%	0.8%
	Panic attacks	13	0.9%	3.7%
	Perfectionism	44	2.9%	12.5%
	Procrastination	189	12.6%	53.5%
	Relationships	28	1.9%	7.9%

	Self-harm	4	0.3%	1.1%
	Sexuality	3	0.2%	0.8%
	Sleep problems	116	7.7%	32.9%
	Stress	127	8.4%	36.0%
	Suicidal thoughts	6	0.4%	1.7%
	Withdrawal	3	0.2%	0.8%
<b>Total</b>		<b>1504</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>426.1%</b>

The results from Table Q1 can be compared with the results from Table Q2-1. When answering Q1 students were asked simply to list all concerns that they have had. Question Q2, however, asks them to rank the top 5 concerns that they had. This explains the differences in ranking between the two tables. Yet, they mostly overlap, as Academic pressures, Procrastination, Feeling tired all the time, Exam panic and Stress remain at the top with only the latter two swapping places.

**Table Q2-1: Comparative weights of the common concerns<sup>3</sup>**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Academic pressures	182	9.4	14.7	14.7
Addiction	15	.8	1.2	15.9
Adjusting to University life	54	2.8	4.4	20.3
Alcohol abuse	14	.7	1.1	21.4
Anger issues	7	.4	.6	22.0
Anxiety	38	2.0	3.1	25.1
Asperger (ASD)	1	.1	.1	25.1
Bereavement, grief and loss	8	.4	.6	25.8
Bullying	2	.1	.2	25.9
Depression	25	1.3	2.0	28.0
Disputes with flat mates	56	2.9	4.5	32.5
Eating disorders	8	.4	.6	33.1
Exam panic	110	5.7	8.9	42.0
Feeling tired all the time	115	5.9	9.3	51.3
Financial issues	81	4.2	6.5	57.9
Harassment	1	.1	.1	58.0
Landlord issues	7	.4	.6	58.5
Loneliness	22	1.1	1.8	60.3
Low mood, mood swings	24	1.2	1.9	62.2

<sup>3</sup> The results shown in the table are based on the issues reported by students in Question 2 of the Questionnaire - Top 5 concerns.

The category 'living alongside mental health' was removed from the data due to inconsistencies resulting from the way data was gathered by different interns. This is not significant as only 7 cases were ever reported.

	Low self-esteem	19	1.0	1.5	63.8
	Mania and bipolar disorders	2	.1	.2	63.9
	Panic attacks	9	.5	.7	64.7
	Perfectionism	25	1.3	2.0	66.7
	Procrastination	170	8.8	13.7	80.4
	Relationships	21	1.1	1.7	82.1
	Self-harm	3	.2	.2	82.4
	Sexuality	3	.2	.2	82.6
	Sleep problems	100	5.2	8.1	90.7
	Stress	108	5.6	8.7	99.4
	Suicidal thoughts	6	.3	.5	99.9
	Withdrawal	1	.1	.1	100.0
	Total	1237	64.0	100.0	
Missing	99	696	36.0		
<b>Total</b>		<b>1933</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

A top ten set of concerns can be extracted from either Table Q1 or from Table Q2-1. Taking into consideration that first year students had the chance to rank the concerns they faced when answering Question 2, this is the data used for choosing the top ten concerns. Therefore, based on Table Q2-1, the Top 10 common concerns for students were identified as:

1. Academic Pressure: 14.7%
2. Procrastination: 13.7%
3. Feeling tired all the time: 9.3%
4. Exam panic: 8.9%
5. Stress: 8.7%
6. Sleep problems: 8.1%
7. Financial issues: 6.5%
8. Disputes with flat mates: 4.5%
9. Adjustment to University life: 4.4%
10. Anxiety: 3.1%

## Monthly surveys

The results from the six monthly surveys that were completed during this academic year can also be used to produce a top ten concerns list. These can be mapped against the top ten concerns as perceived by first year students in March, when the Questionnaire was issued. It is not surprising that the two lists largely overlap and their top three concerns remain the same. Table Q2-2 shows the comparative weight of each concern as recorded during each of the months. The average figure for the concerns have been used to identify the top ten of them.

**Table Q2-2: Comparative weights of the common concerns, monthly records, in %**

Common concerns	Sept	Oct	Nov	Feb	Mar	Apr	Average
Academic pressures	37.7	35.5	39.9	28.0	32.9	39.9	35.65
Procrastination	25.5	27.4	29.0	27.4	24.4	23.2	26.13
Feeling tired all the time	26.1	26.7	28.1	25.9	20.5	19.9	24.53
Stress	22.2	19.7	21.9	19.3	18.7	27.5	21.54
Exam panic	18.7	13.0	21.6	11.8	19.6	31.8	19.42
Sleep problems	15.1	17.3	17.8	20.0	18.2	16.4	17.46
Financial issues	17.3	13.2	11.5	14.5	10.5	10.2	12.87
Anxiety	11.8	9.3	9.4	8.6	9.5	13.7	10.39
Perfectionism	9.9	9.0	7.6	9.4	8.2	7.0	8.54
Adjusting to university life	25.4	7.8	4.5	2.7	2.3	2.2	7.47
Low mood, mood swings	8.5	7.2	6.2	7.0	7.2	7.0	7.18
Loneliness	11.0	5.2	4.3	4.4	4.3	5.4	5.75
Depression	6.9	5.7	4.0	5.8	4.2	7.3	5.64
Relationships	7.1	6.5	5.0	3.4	5.2	5.9	5.54
Disputes with flat-mates	6.7	4.3	4.0	3.7	5.7	6.2	5.09
Low self-esteem	6.9	4.4	4.9	4.8	3.9	5.1	5.00
Addiction (incl. to computer games)	3.5	3.7	2.9	4.0	3.0	2.2	3.23
Panic attacks	4.2	3.6	2.2	2.1	2.5	4.6	3.20
Eating disorders	3.3	3.5	1.9	2.5	2.4	4.6	3.01
Alcohol abuse	2.1	1.9	1.8	2.6	2.9	3.2	2.41
Anger issues	1.3	0.7	1.8	2.0	2.7	3.2	1.93
Bereavement, grief and loss	1.9	0.9	2.1	1.7	1.6	0.8	1.52
Living alongside mental illness	1.2	1.5	1.1	1.2	1.6	1.3	1.33
Sexuality	1.6	1.1	0.4	1.2	1.8	1.1	1.20
Bullying	1.1	0.8	0.7	2.1	1.6	0.5	1.13
Self-harm	1.9	1.3	1.1	1.0	1.0	0.3	1.10
Withdrawal	1.2	1.2	0.8	1.1	1.1	0.8	1.03
Landlord issues	0.9	0.4	0.8	1.3	1.1	1.1	0.95
Suicidal thoughts	0.5	1.1	1.1	0.9	1.0	1.1	0.93
Harassment	0.8	0.3	0.9	0.4	1.0	1.1	0.74
Asperger (ASD)	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.8	0.5	0.52
Mania and bipolar disorders	0.8	0.7	0.2	0.2	0.9	0.3	0.52
Schizophrenia	0.2	0.9	0.2	0.4	0.6	0.0	0.40
Trauma	0.1	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.0	0.31



*Note: total values exceed 100 % as students were able to answer positively more than one issue.*

# Appendix 3

## Questionnaire

### Research project: 'Psychological' profile of an academic year

#### Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey.

#### About the study

The aim of the survey is to assess the psychological profile of first year undergraduates and identify factors that negatively impact upon student welfare throughout the academic year.

By agreeing to participate in this survey you are helping Student Services to design better pastoral and academic support tailored to the needs of students.

The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

#### Data protection and confidentiality

All data will be stored confidentially and for no more than 5 years. After this period these data will be destroyed.

Participants will each be given a unique identifier but names and other personal information will be removed from the data.

Please answer all questions as honestly as possible. If you are uncomfortable answering any questions, please leave these blank. If you would like to withdraw from the study you are free to do so at any time.

#### Contact information

If you have any queries about this survey, please contact Dr. Iliyan Stefanov at [i.s.stefanov@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:i.s.stefanov@dundee.ac.uk).

#### Demographics

**Q1x. Age:**

**Q2x. Gender:**

**Q3x. Home postcode:**

**Q4x. School of study:**

**Q5x. What type of accommodation do you stay in?**

i) Parents home

ii) Own home

iii) Private landlord (rented)

iv) University

v) Other, please specify:

**Q1. Which of the following have been concerns for you while you have been a student at the University of Dundee?**

Please indicate by ticking each that apply.

[SEE APPENDIX 1. 'COMMON CONCERNS SHEET']

**Q2. For each of the issues identified, please rank your top 5 concerns below. 1 being 'highest concern, 5 being 'lowest concern'**

Concern	Rank

**Q3. For each of the issues identified, please list which months of the year you are most likely to experience each concern.**

For example: Concern                      Month

Academic pressure      October, March, July

Concern	Month

**Q4. Of the answers provided, did you seek help?**

Please indicate by each concern with 'Yes' or 'No'

Concern	Yes/No

[If no to all, jump to Q7.]

**Q5. If yes, what type of support did you seek?**

Please explain using the space below

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**Q6. If yes, when did you seek support?**

Please indicate which months you were most likely to seek support

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

[Jump to Q8i.]

**Q7. If no, why didn't you seek support?**

Please explain using the space below

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[Jump to Q8ii.]

**Q8. Which factors most influenced your decision to:**

[i] Seek support:

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[ii] Not seek support:

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**Q9. Which support services are you aware of at the University of Dundee?**

Please indicate by ticking each that apply.

Support Services	
Academic Skills Centre	
Careers Service	
Counseling Service	
Disabilities Services	
Enquiry Team	
Enterprise Gym	
Health Service	
International Advice	
Nightline	
Nursery	
Peer Connections	
Residences Office	
Student Funding	
Student Support Worker	

**Q10. What types of support services would you like to see in place at the University of Dundee?**

Please explain using the space provided below

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**Thank you for completing this survey.**

**[END]**

**Questionnaire appendix 1**

**1. Common concerns sheet**

Common concerns	
Academic pressures	

Addiction (incl. computer games)	
Adjusting to university life	
Alcohol abuse	
Anger issues	
Anxiety	
Asperger (ASD)	
Bereavement, grief and loss	
Bullying	
Depression	
Disputes with flat mates	
Eating disorders	
Exam panic	
Feeling tired all the time	
Financial issues	
Harassment	
Living alongside mental illness	
Landlord issues	
Loneliness	
Low mood, mood swings	
Low self-esteem	
Mania and bipolar disorders	
Panic attacks	
Perfectionism	
Procrastination	
Relationships	
Schizophrenia	
Self-harm	
Sexuality	
Sleep problems	
Stress	
Suicidal thoughts	
Trauma	
Withdrawal	

## Appendix 4

### Focus groups – student services unit head questions

1. Have you noticed that students need different types of support?
2. Which types of support do students seek from your unit (most/least)?
3. When do they seek each type of support?
4. Are you aware of the types of support offered by Student Services?
5. Please indicate which services you have heard of?
6. Have you referred students to any of these services?
7. Have you received students that you have been unable to help?
8. Why were you not able to help them?
9. What steps have you taken to provide support for these students in the future?
10. What positive changes to student welfare have you implemented in the last 12 months?
11. What negative changes to student welfare have you noticed in the last 12 months?
12. Have you received any recommendations for your service from students/staff?
13. What factors do you think increase student welfare?
14. What factors do you think decrease student welfare?
15. What changes would you like to see take place within student services to increase student welfare?
16. What level of support do you provide for students in the first six weeks of the academic year?
17. What level of support do you provide for students in the first semester?
18. What level of support do you provide for students in the second semester?
19. What level of support do you provide for students throughout the academic year?
20. Do you run collaborative projects with other support services?
21. Do you run collaborative projects with other schools or colleges?
22. Would student services benefit from further collaborations?
23. What types of collaborative projects would you like to see?
24. How could your unit benefit from these projects?
25. How might other units' benefit from these projects?

## Appendix 5

### **Collated summary of the responses of student services departments/units to questions during focus groups discussions, April/May 2014**

#### **Q1. Have you noticed that students need different types of support?**

All units within Student Services recognised that students do need different types of support, as individuals. It also depends on the time of year and the course the student is doing. Disabled students may also require some very specific support depending on their needs.

#### **Q2. Which types of support do students seek from your unit (most/least)?**

The type of support students seek varies depending on the unit.

Support for crisis is a common theme – these may be categorised as issues relating to academic work, family or personal circumstances or financial issues.

Units provide a wide range of support, counselling, advice, coaching and workshops. Support is given reactively (response to crisis) or proactively (plans, workshops, coaching)

Difficult to ascertain from data gathered what were the most common and least common types of support. Response probably relates to most common.

#### **Q3. When do they seek each type of support?**

More students seek support during semester. Most units reported little variation in the use of the service through the year. Some units because of the work that they are engaged in reported slightly busier periods relating to particular needs of students – e.g. visa extensions, exam periods or transition. Units also noted that many students do not seek support until the last minute when they are at crisis point.

Mitigation letters were often asked for at the end of semesters or exam resit periods

#### **Q4. Are you aware of the types of support offered by Student Services?**

All units were well aware of the support offered by other units within Student Services. Regular updates from other units and opportunities for staff to meet and network more informally were seen as beneficial for building relationships and knowledge of developments/ work within other units.

#### **Q5. Please indicate which services you have heard of?**

All units said that they were aware of all Student Services units.



### **Q6. Have you referred students to any of these services?**

All units had made referrals to other student services units – though some referred to all other units. Some only referred to specific units. Referrals were also made to the academic schools and the student's GP.

### **Q7. Have you received students that you have been unable to help?**

Most units stated that they were able to help the students, some recognised that students required specialist help and referred the student to this internally or externally. Units stated that they were not able to help students sometimes because their service was not the appropriate support for the student. Students were always helped to access appropriate supports as required.

### **Q8. Why were you not able to help them?**

Services cannot always resolve issues for students – they can only help by offering support by listening or being available to them. There is a limitation on some services about the length of support that can be provided e.g. Counselling. There may also be limitations on the service that can be provided for a student if the issue is temporary e.g. Disability. If the issue relates to an area that we are legally unable to respond to e.g. advice about private accommodation. Units also recognise that there are limitations on what support they can provide and will refer students to specialised support either within the university or to external sources of support e.g. Citizens' Advice Bureau or GP.

### **Q9. What steps have you taken to provide support for these students in the last 12 months?**

Units have identified resources or requested more staff cover. They have also referred students to internal or external supports. They have ensured that students are followed up and have actually accessed the suggested support. Students who have withdrawn are identified so that other clients can be taken on e.g. Mental Health.

### **Q10. What positive changes to student welfare have you implemented in the last 12 months?**

Units have developed many positive changes to student welfare in the past 12 months these include:

New online toolkits for students; changes to workshops or course provision; changes to working practices to streamline and make more effective for students; implementation of additional monitoring and recording progress; training opportunities for staff within and out with Student Services; increased provision for students; recruitment of additional staff; development of university wide policies; increased social opportunities for students and improvements to the Welcome programme; work with other agencies e.g. NHS Tayside, DUSA; work with academic schools.

### Q11. What negative changes to student welfare have you noticed in the last 12 months?

Almost all units mentioned budgetary restraint – lack of resource and more being demanded of staff consequent reduction in the service available to students. The increasing complexity of student's issues. Issues relating to referral within the directorate. External political and financial climate impacting on students e.g. "bedroom tax", parental financial constraints, child care costs. Increase in parental demands on services and interference with the service's ability to deal with issues which have arisen. Students having issues with online gambling addiction. Issues relating to academic schools' approach to disabled students leading to inconsistencies and unhelpful practices.

### Q12. Have you received any recommendations for your service from students/staff?

All units report recommendations from students or staff, all units engage in some sort of review or evaluation process in a variety of formats – online questionnaires, feedback forms, emails and verbal feedback. Some of recommendations have already been implemented, some require further work to be done, a few require extra resource that may not be readily available due to budget constraints. Units have clearly tried to implement changes that can be made within available resourcing. For instance some new staff have been recruited e.g. English language support, Enquiry Team; changes have been made to reduce technical problems e.g. stronger Wifi signal in Disability IT suite; revision of academic processes e.g. dyslexia marking. Availability of peer connectors – Drop In to be re-established in library. Waiting times for mental health are too long. Improvements to availability of appointments and the waiting room for Counselling.

Units report that students are satisfied with services but there is still scope for improvements, some minor changes to practice or things which improve service experience.

### Q13. What factors do you think increase student welfare?

This is a summary from all units:

**Recruitment/ Guidance Factors:** Students admitted to the university are clear about their course choice and are given appropriate guidance about this. Clarifying learning objectives/teaching and assessment requirements in programme recruitment information and throughout the AY

**Personal Factors for student:** Life skills, problem solving, budgeting

Students being ready for university life – personal resilience, maturity and ability to self-motivate. Students' attitude about contacting support services or academic departments. Students' awareness of support services.

**Academic Factors:** Advising students of the name and contact details of their personal tutors/DSOs/other key contacts and ensuring these are up-to-date. Providing flexibility, where reasonable, in teaching and assessment methods to

accommodate diverse learning needs. Providing teaching/publicity materials in accessible formats and using accessible templates

Staff are the gate keepers. Working with the schools – tutors are huge potential. Ability of academic schools to respond and refer students to appropriate sources of support. Students actively engaging with their academic departments.

**Support Staff (SS and Academic):**

Request and respond to student feedback on a regular basis

Providing training for staff in supporting students with diverse learning needs and learning styles. Appropriate crisis response and adequately trained personnel who can deal with this.

Appropriate crisis management planning and policies in place.

**Accessibility of Support Services:**

Providing frequent reminders/repeated opportunities to engage with support services throughout the academic year and at key points, such as before exams. Prompt appropriate assistance quick assistance when required, direct from the appropriate service without having to go through too many people to get there. Adequate provision of general student pastoral support services with easy accessibility to the support provision both during usual working hours and out with as required.

Students engaging with support services before situations escalate. Accessibility and adequate provision of specialist services within the university – this includes the waiting time to be seen by specialist services and the availability of these services. Provision of peer support including mentoring. Ability of Student Services units to refer to other units.

**Information Giving:** Awareness and publicity of services. Giving the right information to students. Accurate information on how to look after their general health. Information given appropriately to families about support services for students prior to admission. Support for students provided in University accommodation. Availability of information and resources to aid self-help for students.

**Practical Factors:** Helping people pay the rent and buy food - students having adequate income to live on. Students are accommodated in suitable, well maintained, safe, warm property.

**Q14. What factors do you think decrease student welfare?**

**Staffing issues** -Staffing (reduction) – less ability to respond to students in a timely manner. Inability of student to access academic support when required, e.g. academics not available suggested that a university policy on this is needed about this. Lack of team working within Student Services – units do not always co-ordinate their efforts and referral to University Health service for Mental Health needs to go through a GP which can sometimes be a difficulty if you are aware that the student has issues but they will not see a GP.

**Resource Issues** - Lack of resources. Lack of staff availability. Student Support Assistants are unpaid and not on a rota – so less are available out of hours than otherwise could be the case.

**Practice** - Inflexible practices that do not anticipate the needs of disabled students create barriers to access and can lead to additional stress, anxiety etc. and ultimately impact on retention. Disempowerment – if we take things away from them, decision-making etc. Lack of personal contact, potential for disengagement – tendency for it all now to be on-line. Sometimes delays in accessing appropriate services, conflicting information can be given from different services. Increased waiting times for students to be seen. Lack of support for assistive technologies. Inclusiveness of student not always as fully supported as it should be. Not being able to assist students with concerns relating to finding private accommodation. Generalising about students and thinking that only a few student have issues. Lack of cultural understanding and the social needs of all students being catered for rather than those who want to drink/party – can lead to isolation. Duplication of effort and students being “bounced around” too many people to resolve their issue.

**Student's Response to issue** – some will not tackle issue and adopt a “Head in the sand” reaction. Others leave things to the last moment. Students not engaging with their academic departments or support services. Students can feel there is a stigma attached to the issues facing them. Often anxiety about finance.

**Social Areas**- Lack of informal social space on campus – university residences have little in the way of common rooms, there are few places to sit, talk or chat outside or inside on campus, space is only devoted to learning/ teaching or administrative space other than places where food/ drinks are sold commercially. There is a great need for other types of spaces where social or even academic discourse can take place.

### **Q15. What changes would you like to see take place within student services to increase student welfare?**

Most units mentioned the new Enquiry Centre being a key aspect of change within Student Services which will enhance student welfare. Some felt that once this was implemented it would be worthwhile waiting for this to bed in before implementing further changes. Referral routes and protocols between units need to be sorted out for clarity and to enable quicker easier referrals to improve service delivery. Students need to be clearly placed at the centre of all that we do and we should not lose sight of students as individuals even though we are catering for the mass. Improvements in awareness within the student body (marketing) and communication between teams about what is communicated is essential. Case handover – and potential for case conferences if more than one service is involved – with consent of student. A more accessible base for Peer Connections drop in support.

### **Q16. What level of support do you provide for students in the first six weeks of the academic year?**

Some units report little difference from other times of the year. Units which are actively involved in delivery of Welcome events and related activities are very busy with this during 1<sup>st</sup> 6 weeks. Some staff engage with academic departments to deliver talks to students to raise awareness of services. The level of support provided by Disability is the same throughout the academic year and depends on students' individual needs. Some students are in contact with them long before they arrive as all applicants who disclose a disability are automatically advised to contact that service. Some also make contact prior to application, particularly those with complex support needs. The nature of the support we provide may vary throughout the year with a focus prior to arrival/in the first semester on needs assessment arranging support, sharing adjustments with Schools etc. Training with assistive software and specialist study skills support tends to be provided once students start to receive assignment requirements although training for some students with complex needs will be arranged prior to starting their course where feasible.

Support varies throughout the year. However, high level of cover required.

### **Q17. What level of support do you provide for students in the first semester?**

Most units report similar level of support throughout semester. Some like Pastoral Support report a slight tapering off towards Christmas break. More workshops and individual help given for stress management. Later in semester more issues with stress and isolation become apparent. Within Disability, students may also present with specific concerns during the academic year e.g. prior to examination periods, difficulty with academic requirements (leading to dyslexia screening request) etc.

### **Q18. What level of support do you provide for students in the second semester?**

Most units report similar level of support throughout semester. Health has reduced hours during vacation periods. International Advice provide more immigration advice and visa extension, Schengen visa and also Family visit visas and visas for graduation later in second semester. Pastoral Support has fewer Welcome events in January Welcome but continues with other support.

### **Q19. What level of support do you provide for students throughout the academic year?**

Most units report similar level of support throughout semester. Health and Counselling have reduced hours during vacation periods. International Advice continue to provide more immigration advice and visa extension, Schengen visa and also Family visit visas and visas for graduation later in second semester. Pastoral Support. Pastoral Support continues to offer general support and Peer Support – same as in both semesters – reduced staff cover in vacation periods – but always one staff member available. Peer Support not always available in vacation periods.

### Q20. Do you run collaborative projects with other support services?

ASC and Counselling run "Procrastination" Workshops for students. Units have contributed to each other's projects or Student Services fairs and the Welcome events/ activities. Health and Disability are working on the creation of a Mental Health Resource.

### Q21. Do you run collaborative projects with other schools or colleges?

There are several collaborative projects which Student Services units have run or are running with academic departments including: Stay on Course, Summer School, SafeTALK in Medical School, presentations to students during induction, STI project between Health and DUSA, Disability have the largest number of collaborations including : Inclusive practice award/showcase with LLC; Alternative Formats Service with UoD IT and LLC; DisabledGo project with Estates; Development of policy and guidance in liaison with QA, LLC, HR, Safety Services; DSOs in Academic Schools and requests .for research. Welcome Week is collaborative project between academic schools, Student Services units (especially Pastoral Support and Enquiry Team), LLC, DUSA, ISE and Estates and Buildings.

### Q22. Would student services benefit from further collaborations?

The units were clear that they considered such collaborations as positive, enhancing what could be done and improving student experience. Some made suggestions for future collaborations such as joint training/ workshops. Further work with students in schools or those articulating from colleges – collaborative work with the new Transitions Officer. More engagement with academic schools and adviser of studies. It was felt that each unit had its own strengths as well.

### Q23. What types of collaborative projects would you like to see?

A variety of suggestions were made:

- **Transition:** Further collaboration with Secondary Schools and FE Colleges to ensure smoother transition to University for disabled students, including raising awareness of the support available in each sector.
- **Training / Workshops/Toolkits:** Events that staff member could attend, e.g. – staff taster sessions including Procrastination workshops. Resilience sessions with academic schools. Student toolkit type project for students to utilise aspects of units already developed – Stress management and procrastination workshops, suicide prevention training. Allowing for student self-help. Look at how we build resilience in students and how we can enhance this collaboratively. Utilise student volunteers to be trained to help deliver sessions for other students. . Stress management workshops for medical students
- **Academic developments:** Enterprise module – with careers. FA college of PASS module
- **Collaboration with new Enquiry Centre:** Working with new Enquiry Centre staff to ensure greatest understanding on which health services to signpost to in the first instance. This would reduce student journey, with most

appropriate service accessed first time hence improving student welfare and experience; Collaboration with Enquiry Centre to ensure students are referred appropriately and support is in place and followed up

- **Peer Connections initiatives:** Café Conversations for International Students – hosted by Peer Connectors and jointly promoted by ASC English Language support also Peer Connections Drop In within in the main library in conjunction with LLC.

#### Q24. How could your unit benefit from these projects?

Pre-sessional support for international students to help them socialise and integrate. More pro-active work than re-active. Will be more effective volume wise. Less numbers needing counselling. Appropriate signposting to our service would allow timely treatment with no delays thus reducing possible numbers of appointments required, reducing the waiting time for appointments. Collaboration with the Enquiry Centre will streamline the route to support for students – the location of the Enquiry Centre will especially aid this as it likely to be well used by students. Proactive approaches like the toolkit will reduce the need for reactive element of work and free up time for other work / planning to happen. Potential to share good practice, internally and externally. Availability of new training or resources for staff/ students. Collaboration helps budget spend as DUSA can help to buy materials.

#### Q25. How might other units' benefits from these projects?

There is a lot of potential to share good practice. More effective resource use and joined up working may lead to more appropriate referrals and online resources could reduce some demands on units. Referral waiting times would be less. Reduce any confusion as to which service is accessed when More pro-active work than re-active. It will be more effective volume wise

If students are more resilient there should be less pressure on student services as a whole.

# Appendix 6

## Stay on course leaflets





# STAY ON COURSE

## IF YOU ARE STRUGGLING TO STAY ON COURSE

If you are finding it difficult to **Stay on Course** with your studies in the university you may find help by approaching your Academic School Office, who can direct you to the most appropriate student support service. The earlier you do so, the quicker you will receive help and support.

However, if you are facing challenges that are impacting on your studies or yourself personally, we may approach you to discuss and to offer you help and support should you require it.

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

### STEP 1

Your Academic School Office may contact you to find out how are you doing with your studies and offer you academic support if you need it. If you tell them that you are facing difficulties, that are non-academic in nature, they will put you in contact with the Student Pastoral Support Team, who will then offer further support, or direct you to other student support services as appropriate and with your consent.

### STEP 2

The Student Pastoral Support Team will discuss with you what help and support is available and will work with you on a **Stay on Course Plan** for you to follow that will help you get back on track and **Stay on Course**.





# STAY ON COURSE

## STEP 3

We will ensure you are aware of all the information and support options available, so that you can make informed choices. We will also keep in touch with you throughout the time it takes to follow the **Stay on Course Plan** and help you make it happen.

## STEP 4

With your consent, we will keep your Academic School up to date with the progress you are making on the **Stay on Course Plan**, so they can offer you extra academic help if you need that. This can also help the Exams Board to consider any appeal you might make in regard of exam marks or coursework.

## STAY ON COURSE!

Once you are back on track and things improve for you; we will still keep in contact occasionally, to offer friendly encouragement and to ensure that you continue to progress in your studies.

You can also contact us at any time by emailing [pastoralsupport@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:pastoralsupport@dundee.ac.uk)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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# STAY ON COURSE

## A PRO-ACTIVE APPROACH TO RETENTION

**We know that** there are students who find it difficult to **Stay on Course** who do not seek help and support for a variety of reasons, including that they may not appreciate that they need it. It is then that their attendance at classes, level of course work or academic performance in general often begins to suffer.

**We are eager** to offer such students early support, which will help them to quickly recover and **Stay on Course**, so they are not put at risk of failing the module, the year, or their studies.

**We aim to** shift efforts from a reactive approach to a **pro-active** approach in providing students with support. This will be a 'flag-and-follow' approach with academic departments flagging up the student issue, which will then be followed up by the Student Pastoral Support Team. This should enhance the student experience, aid transition and retention.

**Let us help you** to help your students **Stay on Course!**

**IF YOU** (the School) become aware that a student

- drops his/her attendance at classes
- consistently submits course work late
- struggles with the course in general
- is considered to be in need of help by their academics

**AND the case does not** clearly require support from any of the specialised Student Services departments (such as Academic Skills Centre, Disability Services, Counselling etc.), in which case a referral direct to the specialised service should be made as usual.

**LET US KNOW\***, so we can:

- invite the student for a chat
- assess their needs of help and support
- work with them to put together an individualised Stay on Course Plan
- help them follow the Stay on Course Plan and get back on course
- keep you informed of their progress regarding the above with their consent
- securely record the information, so the exam boards and/or the student can make use of it, should that be required.

By putting the needs of the student at the centre, and working with you in cooperation, we can help them **Stay on Course!**

\* The student must always be asked for their consent to be referred for support

## **Contact**

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AMOSSHE

The Student Services Organisation