Executive Summary

This strategy for student support affirms the core purpose of student support in the University community:

- sets out a strategic vision for student support
- summarises a number of relevant points relating to delivery mechanisms
- is aligned with the institutional Strategic Plan.

1. Student Support Mission

The purpose of student support within the University community is to:

- Enhance the overall (physical, psychological and social) well-being and opportunities for success of all students in the context of their academic studies
- Enable every student to build sound relationships with other students, within academic departments and within the institution as a whole, so contributing to a sense of belonging
- Enable students to develop life skills as they progress through the University
- Contribute positively to the quality of the student experience and to support recruitment, progression and retention
- Enhance the reputation of the University in relation to its student services.

The strategy for student support is thus an important supportive strand in the delivery of the aspirations associated with the student community as expressed in the University’s Strategic Plan.

2. Strategic Vision for Student Support

Student support is necessarily and appropriately a partnership activity, with the following key players providing a range of complementary services to enhance the student experience.

- Academic Departments
- Students’ Union
- Accommodation & Commercial Services (for residential student support)
- University-wide support services (principally the Student Services Department).

We aim to be clear about roles, responsibilities and boundaries of services, recognising student rights and responsibilities, and providing options to support student choice and to foster student engagement. See http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid for more information on all student support services.

2.1 Academic Departments

The expectation is that academic departments deliver student support in line with the University’s Principles for Personal and Academic Support: http://www.shef.ac.uk/lets/pp/support/tutors This emphasises the importance of students having a named contact fulfilling a defined set of core duties, including acting as a first point of contact and a referral “gateway” to the wider array of student support available within the University. Additional information regarding postgraduate research students can be found at http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/pgr-support/supervisorsportal. In delivering services to students, academic departments need support from other stakeholders, with the Student Services Department playing a key role in training and ongoing guidance, including via their Supporting the Supporters programme for staff.

Goal – to deliver high quality support at a consistent level across all departments.
2.2 The Students’ Union

The role of the Union of Students in student support is focussed both on community building activities such as societies, student activities and volunteering, and on direct support services like the University Nursery and the Student Advice Centre. The Union of Students also has a prominent role in coordinating activities in the residential setting. The aim is both to make effective connections between services offered in the residences and the provision on central campus, as well as to facilitate residential student activities and representation, with an emphasis on supporting the whole student community.

Goal – to continue to develop student-led activities in the context of the University’s overall student support strategy.

2.3 University Support Services

The role of University-wide services, in particular the Student Services Department, is principally to deliver centralised support direct to students, whether generically through services such as SSiD, or particularly via services for specific student groups. Where appropriate this support focuses on individual students, when particular issues arise. A secondary – but equally important – function is to identify and actively support colleagues elsewhere in the University (such as personal tutors and departmental administrators) who support individual students in their own context. This training, guidance and support function is delivered through a range of staff-facing services, in particular the Supporting the Supporters programme.

Goal – to deliver high quality services within the context of a diverse student population, taking a central role in training and guidance on student support issues across the institution.

2.4 Accommodation and Commercial Services

Delivery of support in the student residences is the responsibility of Accommodation and Commercial Services. Support is peer-led at the front line, with professional management located in the ACS structure. Alongside this student-facing provision delivered by ACS, the Student Services Department has a key role in training, guidance and support for relevant ACS staff. On an ongoing basis there need to be well developed communication systems linking student support staff in ACS and in the Student Services Department in order to maximise the impact and effectiveness of the overall support structure.

Goal – to deliver high quality student support to all residents who hold an accommodation contract with the University

2.5 Achieving Partnership Working

Effective communication across the various partners in student support is critical in achieving the vision expressed in this strategy. The University’s Student Support Forum (chaired by the Vice President - Education) takes an overview of student support within the University, with a particular emphasis on achieving a partnership approach, within an agreed framework of objectives across the institution in line with this strategy. Forum membership is principally drawn from the key provider groups referred to above.

Goal – to achieve integrated and consistent student support, within the matrix of services available across the University.

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