Student Progress Service

Annual Plan 2013/14

Context, Purpose, Values, Priorities, Aims and Objectives

September 2013

A. Context

Institutional Strategy

The University's Vision Statement, Mission and Objectives, underpinning our plan, are as follows:

Vision - the kind of university we wish to be:

- Our vision is of Newcastle as a civic university with a global reputation for academic excellence.

Mission statement – what we aim to do:

- to be a world-class research-intensive university
- to deliver teaching and facilitate learning of the highest quality
- to play a leading role in the economic, social and cultural development of the North East of England.

Objectives - As a University, our institutional objectives are to achieve:

- top 20 in the UK for research
- top 20 in the UK for student satisfaction
- focus on three Societal Challenge Themes: Ageing; Social Renewal; Sustainability
- a significant international, national and regional profile and reputation
- financial and environmental sustainability

Student and Academic Services strategy

The purpose of Services (SAS) is to provide an integrated range of high quality, innovative and customer-focused services to students, University staff and external partners and Student and Academic stakeholders so as to ensure that the student experience at Newcastle University is exceptional. The SAS services have a key role to play in supporting the University to achieve its strategic and enabling objectives.

Aspiration for the broader collection of Student Services.

The broader collection of student services operating via King's Gate aims:

'To deliver an excellent and professional service to all our stakeholders and to provide co-ordinated, accessible support throughout the student academic journey'.

B. Purpose

The purpose of the Student Progress Service is to support the University's strategies by providing an integrated range of high quality, innovative and customer-focused services to students, University staff and other stakeholders so as to ensure that the student experience at Newcastle University is excellent.

Our vision is to be one of the most comprehensive and efficient providers of student progression services in the country. Our mission is to facilitate and support student progression through the academic processes of the University.

Overall, the Service contributes to University policy development and practice insofar as it relates to the student experience and works collaboratively with a number of Student Services to deliver key University objectives.

The Student Progress Service comprises a number of teams and functions, with key aims and activities noted below. Key indicators for these activities are provided in Appendix A.

Casework. The Team aims to ensure the fair and efficient handling of all student casework. Key activities include: student appeals and complaints including those related to Personal Extenuating Circumstances; assessment irregularities and other student discipline; OIA casework; support for University regulations and student policies.

Awards. The Team aims to ensure the efficient operation of congregation ceremonies so the events are enjoyable and memorable for guests and graduates, and that University awards are administered in an accurate and timely manner. Key activities include: issuing invitations to potential graduates and confirming eligibility to attend, arranging venues, arranging helpers and other aspects of event planning; issuing parchments and HEARs to graduates; supporting international ceremonies.

Examinations. The Team aims to ensure the efficient delivery of 3 major exam sessions per year and mid-term exams as required. Key activities include: arranging venues, invigilators and copies of papers; publishing examination timetables; arranging off-campus examinations and examinations for students with additional requirements; administration of contracts and payments to external examiners.

Research Student Support Team. The Team aims to ensure efficient and timely support to research students and academic staff. Key activities include: the registration of research students; recording and support for quality assurance milestone activities such as the learning agreement, project approval, annual review; the appointment of external examiners and pass list production; research council student administration; advice to the academic community on research student matters; support for the relevant Faculty committees and Deans of Postgraduate Study.

Interaction Team. The Team aims to provide an efficient, helpful and integrated service to students, acting as front line support for a number of student service teams. Key activities include: running the main University helpdesk for students; handling other student service requests received by telephone and web enquiry; running the University switchboard; managing pre-application enquiries and prospectus requests.

Postgraduate Admissions. The Team aims to ensure that the University's postgraduate admissions processes are as efficient as possible and responsive to the University's recruitment agenda. Key activities include: processing applications; making decisions on applications in line with agreed criteria; support for MCD activities where possible; issue of visa documentation.

Timetabling Services. The Team aim to ensure the prompt delivery of an effective teaching timetable. Key activities include: liaison with schools on timetabling requirements; negotiation on timetabling constraints; support for the module choice exercise; development of timetabling systems; manage and advise on the effective use of teaching spaces; support for ad hoc room bookings.

Visa Team. This Team aims to support students through Home Office processes for visa renewal. Key activities include: liaison with INTO; the provision of student workshops; document checking for visa applications; operation of the student batch scheme; advice to the University on Home Office policy and requirements.

Data Team: Managing the University's student registration activities; liaison with ISS and Schools on all major system developments for student management.

In addition, collectively, the Student Progress Service provides support for an array of University policy and system development.

C. Values

In striving to **deliver customer-focused, excellent and professional services**, SAS services are underpinned by a set of values. These are:

- **Customers**: being single minded in striving to meet the needs of a wide and diverse group of internal and external customers, with a particular focus on meeting the needs of students and on enhancing the student experience
- **Impact**: focusing totally on the impact and effectiveness of services in delivering the University's mission
- **Diversity:** respecting and promoting diversity and actively demonstrating our commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity for both service users and staff

- **Innovation:** embracing change and challenge in a positive way and demonstrating innovation in the delivery of our services
- **Learning:** a shared valuing of the services we each provide, and a commitment to learn and work closely together to improve them
- **Quality:** delivering high quality integrated services informed by best practice and contemporary thinking
- **Value for Money:** seeking value for money in all that we do as a cluster of services and aiming to ensure that our customers get value for money from the activities they engage in with us

D.   Operating principles

The delivery of SAS services is underpinned by the following operating principles:

- **High standards of service delivery and continuous quality improvement** to ensure ongoing relevance and fitness for purpose
- **Partnership working**, with both external and internal partners, and in particular, with schools and faculties, other services and the Union Society
- **Effective leadership and management**
- **Efficient deployment of resource** to gain maximum impact
- **Effective use and further development of staff expertise.**

E.   Our priorities for development for 2013/14

The service aims and ongoing objectives are noted below. In the context of the Institutional and SAS strategies, and the key purpose of the Service, our **key priorities for 2013/14 are highlighted in red/bold**. The lead manager is indicated.

Aim 1: To provide effective, expert and customer-led services within a framework of continuous service improvement.

- To provide a professional and comprehensive service for student and staff users, as noted in the service purpose above, and continually review the service provision in the light of feedback. (All SPS Managers)

- To provide expert and current advice to applicants, students, academic units and services on the student life-cycle activities. (All Staff)

- To continue to support training for academic staff on key issues, including a new programme for support staff in academic units. (MED, AMcN)

- To keep under review the postgraduate admission function to increase efficiency and provide an effective service for continued University growth of postgraduate applicant numbers. Particular objectives include: **management of new / non-standard programmes; improving the average turnaround time;** clarifying English Language eligibility criteria and liaison with academic units about research student processes. (AMcN)

- To continue to improve customer understanding of RSST activities and related IT opportunities noting in particular web resources, BW reports and ePortfolio functions. (AMcN)

- To ensure that the University retain its Home Office license to admit international students. New activities include: **support for the new on-line visa application form; continued communication about changing Home Office requirements;** further SPS led CAS and ID audits. (MED, TB)

- To successfully run the registration 2013 event – key changes for 2013 are new cameras and system fields for ID checking. (MED, JG)

- To successfully operate King's Gate Student Services helpdesk and related activities through the August to November 2013 peak, including adjustments to reflect demand for accommodation and new Home Office visa renewal processes. (SO'D)

- To produce a prompt and effective teaching timetable for 2013/14 and initiate a subsequent review. (AR)

- To support the **migration of Medical Sciences timetable data to Syllabus Plus** as the primary scheduling tool for both Newcastle and NUMed medical/biomed programmes and resulting integration with SAP-SAM functionality. (AR)

- To continue to review and enhance our services against the customer first standard and support the wider cross-service commitment to Customer First**.** (All managers)

- To ensure effective ongoing management of the Service, including any opportunities for cost efficiency and support for integration across SAS / the wider cluster of student services. (MED)

- To organise and execute a further congregation ceremony in China for our overseas students, learning from the experience of the first Chinese ceremony and establishing methodology. (LB)

- To run the **first congregation ceremony at NuMed**, Malaysia. (LB)

- Manage the first **large scale, multi-school, congregation in Singapore**. (LB)

- Establish support for Partnership Committee within SPS. (MED)

Aim 2: To lead and co-ordinate the enhancement of corporate databases, providing an effective and integrated infrastructure which supports the management of student progression.

- **To work with ISS to develop new Business Information/Warehouse models and reports as part of the structural re-write of student BW reports.** (All managers and SPS key users)

- To review testing capacity for system developments as they affect student record management for the University. (MED)

- **Support discussions on ISS capacity** for system developments as they affect student record management for the University. (MED)

- **To support the planned Student Attendance Monitoring System** (SAMS) including an electronic student notice of absence form; enabling first year student seminar records to be managed on Syllabus Plus and loaded into SAP for attendance to be recorded; tools for academic units to communicate with students; development of University reporting capacity; attendance monitoring audits; the part 2 business case. (MED / JMG / AR)

- To develop the Syllabus Plus software to **provide a link to SAP** for attendance records and **individual timetables for first year students**. (AR)

- To review the **interface with the Sponsor Management System** for admissions and visa renewal, and the upload for student financial data. (AMcN, JMG, MED)

- To review the pilot of application fees for postgraduate applicants and consider with PG Admission Stakeholders whether to extend the requirement to other PGT programmes. (AMcN)

- To work with academic units to fully utilise the new BW reports for research students, to enhance progression and compliance with key stages in the Code of Practice. (AMcN)

- To produce HEARs (Higher Education Achievement Reports) for postgraduate students graduating in December 2013; to ensure graduate access to S3P for the HEAR. (MED, LB and JG).

- To review the administration of examinations with a view to improving efficiency and service to students, particularly those with alternative requirements and the system efficiency opportunities available in the new Syllabus Plus Exam Scheduling software. (LB)

- To support the development of a business case for the management of PECs in SLcM. (MED)

- To continue to improve efficiency by reviewing procedures and systems to meet growing demands. (All managers)

Aim 3: The provision of accessible and responsive services which support the University's quality assurance and quality enhancement agenda.

- To promote the fair and equitable treatment of students through the development and application of the University's regulations and policies. (All Staff)

- To continue to work with Deans on issues arising from student case work, particularly the trend towards more complex casework involving disability or visa issues. (DG)

- To develop a student maternity policy. (MED)

- Revise the web presentation of policies and procedures for students to reflect the Student Charter. (MED)

Aim 4: To support the University's student recruitment and retention objectives.

- To provide a professional and supportive service to prospective students and students wherever they come into contact with the service, whether at initial enquiry, admission, registration or examination. (All staff)

- To place enhancement of the student experience as the main priority in the development and review of our service. (SPS Managers)

- To support the outcomes of the review of pre-sessional provision. (MED, AMcN, TB)

- To run a revised / improved postgraduate Selector training session in liaison with Deans *et al*. (MED, AMcN)

- Liaise with academic units to ensure understanding of how to handle the admission process for research students. (AMcN)

- To review and enhance **support opportunities for pre-sessional student visa conversion**. (MED, TB)

Aim 5: To recruit, retain and develop excellent staff.

- To promote a high performance culture by recognising the achievement of staff. (SPS Managers)

- To invest in staff training and development of success factors. (SPS Managers)

- To continue to promote management development to ensure an effective and professional approach to staff recruitment and support. (SPS Managers)

- To fully implement the PDR recording system. (SPS managers)

- To create opportunities for staff to experience activities in different teams. (MED)

- To **increase decision making capacity for the casework function** and deliver a development programme for the casework team. (MED)

- To develop **strategies to deal with growth in service utilisation** and new developments. (MED)

Appendix A
Key indicators for key SPS activities (normally based on the 2012/13 cycle). [Previous year data in brackets if available] (Percentage change if significant)

- **Postgraduate Applications** data at 24th September 2013 [20th Sept 2012]

Applications per year	**35,572**	[31,216]	(+14%)
Decisions made by the team	**19,708**	[19,207]	(+3%)
CASs issued per year	**2,380**	[c.2,000]	(+19%)
CRM enquiries	**25,885**	[24,441]	(+9%)

- **Registration** data at 1st June 2013 [1st June 2012]
  Registered students **22,976** [22,181] (+4%) of which:
  PG: **6,523** [6,621] (-7%) UG: **16,453** [15,560] (+6%)
  UK/EU: **16,846** [16,876] International: **6,130** [5,314] (+15%)
  c.6,500 completed a module pre-registration exercise. [c.6,500]

- **Timetabling Services**

Modules timetabled	**2,599**	[2,479]	(+5%)
Programmes of study timetabled	**927**	[936]	
Academic Staff included in TT	**1775**	[1,643]	(+8%)
Teaching Spaces timetabled	**344**	[355]	
Teaching activities Scheduled	**22,532**	[20,363]	(+11%)
Room bookings: Manual	**10,725**	[9,681]	(+11%)
Room bookings: Self service	**36,299**	[34,443]	(+5%)
KPIs:			
Teaching Space Utilisation f /Util	**58%/29%**	[52%/26%]	
Effective zoning	**95%**	[95%]	
Student individual timetables	**10,199**	[7,561]	
Pre/post publication TT changes	**694/453**	[634/200]	

- **Examinations**
  Semester One: **675** exams for **12,877** students
  [633 / 12,316] (+5%/+5%)
  Semester Two: **815** exams for **14,718** students
  [825 / 13,381] (-1%/+10%)
  Resits: **838** exams for **2081** students [793 / 1,935] (+6%/+8%)
  Mid-term exams: **422**
  Students with special examination arrangements **908** [874] (+4%)
  161 off campus examination for **200** students - **418** sittings at **50** venues [135 / 127 / 391 / 40] (+19% /+57% / +7% / +25%)
  External Examiners (taught programmes) appointed: c.95 [101]

- **Student Cases**

Academic Appeals	**163**	[159]	(+3%)
Assessment Irregularities	**73**	[48]	(+52%)
Complaints	**60**	[25]	(+140%)
Disciplinary matters	**281**	[274]	(+3%)

- **Interaction Team**.

King's Gate student helpdesk	**55,188**	[54,325]	(+2%)
Student Services Telephone line	**40,263**	[49,231]	(-18%)
Other student/applicant queries	**53,877**	[50,794]	(+6%)
Calls to the University switchboard	**88,082**	[87,253]	(-5%)

- **Research Student Support Team**

	HaSS			SAgE	
PGR students*	**871**	[742]	(+18%)	**933**	[709]
PGR exams:	**173**	[153]	(+14%)	**174**	[156] (+12%)
Res Council PGRs	**102**	[91]	(+12%)	**186**	[175] (+6%)

  *Now includes writing-up/under exam due to Home Office rule changes

- **Visa Team**

Workshops offered /students attended	**56/1,401**	[55/1,406]
Students offered support	**8,498***	[5,902+]

  * To review methodology

- **Congregations**
  July: **35** ceremonies, **3,856** graduates, **12,569** guests
  [35/3,802/11,986] (+1%/+5%)
  Dec: **16** ceremonies, **1,771** graduates, **4,088** guests
  [14/1703/ 3,903] (+4%/+5%)
  Overseas: **2** ceremonies **310** graduates, **681** guests [1/65/350]
  Parchments / HEAR documents: c.**8,950** (including **482** duplicates)
  [8,500 / 441] (+5%/+9%)

Appendix B – Key achievements for the Student Progress Service in 2012/13

- Highly successful annual events during 2012/13 – registration, examinations, congregations – noting overall significant volume increases for all activities.

- Managing to process a further substantial growth in postgraduate applications for admission whilst keeping average turnaround times reasonable and also effectively managing CRM enquiries

- Key role in delivering a new Selector training programme.

- Delivery of the 2013/14 teaching timetable within the contracted period and 2 weeks earlier than in previous years despite a staff vacancy.

- Significant improvement in teaching room utilisations.

- Successful extension of the CRM system for the Research Student Support Team.

- Effectively management of the student service telephone line using a new PC based telephony system, with a significant reduction in missed calls, an overall reduction in calls and exceeded the agreed service standard.

- A successful 2012 clearing to registration peak in King's Gate.

- A new customer feedback event for student services and plans for further promotion.

- Further development for the on-line administration of Research Student key stages via the ePortfolio system - Project Approval and a pilot for the nomination of Examiners.

- Successful introduction of the Business Warehouse reports for Postgraduate Research Students, giving useful management information in this area for the first time.

- Responding to further Home Office changes for CAS production.

- Support for retention of the Home Office Tier 4 licence: enhanced ID checking for returning international students; new, proactive data management for visa renewal; support or internal audits; SPS led CAS and ID audits.

- Continued development of the University's Student Self Service Project - S3P – including the provision of the final HEAR.

- Supported transition arrangements for SAMS: attendance record audits, revised advice, adjustments to attendance policy etc.

- Supported the development of a link to NeSS from the Student Information Gateway – SIG.

- Cross-working between teams – e.g. to support the development of the case database.

- Managing a severe staffing shortfall in the casework team for several months, whilst also supporting an increase in casework.

- Managing: the initial Fitness to Study cases; the growth in more complex casework involving disability / mental health or visa issues; challenging disciplinary cases with a need to manage exclusions.

- Development and implementation of system to submit examination question papers online.

- Release of the new External Examiner database with online reporting function.

- Review of examination rules and production of new institutional policy for implementation in September 2013.

- Organised and ran the first congregation ceremony in China for 222 graduates and 314 guests.

- The Examinations and Awards Team were shortlisted for a THELMA.

- Re-designed the delivery of visa workshops/appointments from paper-based Tier 4 applications to 'print and send' applications.

- Extended the visa batch services to dependants.