**University of Essex and Student’s Union**

**WELFARE FORUM**

**Monday 10th December 2012 at 12pm**

**MINUTES**

**Chair: Lily Flaherty (LF)** SU VP Welfare Community

**Present: Sian Lovesy (SL)** SU Advice Centre Deputy Manager; **Angela Jones (AJ)** Deputy Director of Student Support: Disability**; Adam Atkins (AA)** Student Support Office: Graduate Training; **Paul Humphreys (PH)** Security Manager; **Julia Murphy (JM)** Multi-Faith Chaplaincy, Anglican Chaplain; **Sister Patricia Barclay (PB)** Catholic Chaplaincy Assistant**; Marilyn Shanks (MS)** International Academy Social and Welfare Officer; **Deniz Kemal (DK)** Advice Centre Senior Adviser

1. **Welcome & Introductions**
2. **Apologies:**

**Fiona Harvey (FH)** Advice Centre Manager**; Rachel Fletcher (RF)** Director of Student Support); **Paula Rothero (PR)** Deputy Director of Student Support: Advice; **Jo Wilson (JW)** Deputy Director of Student Support: Wellbeing; Gemma **Rinefierd (GR)** Deputy Director of Student Support: Residence Life); Karen **Bush (KB)** Equality and Diversity Manager**; Zain Kukaswadia (ZK)** SUVP Education

1. **Matters Arising:**
2. **Service Updates**

Security – Paul Humphries

* PH stated they have seen a dramatic decrease in violent incidents occurring on campus so far this academic year. There has been 1 major incident where a girl was seriously assaulted with a glass bottle. The police have been involved.
* 70% of the incidents reported have been drug related, particularly the use of cannabis within University accommodation.
* Theft issues in accommodation remains a problem. Most incidents are opportunistic. The PCSO has been involved in trying to educate students on safety to aim to reduce the number of incidents of this kind.
* PB raised a question about previous incidents with people found trying to sleep in the Chaplaincy. PH confirmed this had been an issue approx 18 months ago but since then the decision was taken to lock the Chaplaincy between 12am and 4am which appears to have stopped this being an issue.

Student Support – Angela Jones and Adam Atkins

* RSN – recruitment is due to start in the New Year. GR will be on maternity leave as of Easter so arrangements are being put in place to cover her leave.
* AA advised of the Christmas arrangements that have been put in place and handed around information leaflets explaining the arrangements. Details of different services opening hours are available on the website. There will be a Christmas Common Room provided to students remaining on campus between 21 December 2012 and 2 January 2013 in Zest/The Orangery. There is also a trip to the Mercury Theatre on 29th December. There will be an International Students’ Christmas party taking place at Wivenhoe House – a Santa is still needed. There will also be a discounted rate on food at Wivenhoe House Hotel over the vacation period.

VP Welfare Community – Lily Flaherty

* LF has been working with the Police to make a safety video for students. They have received £400 from the Police to fund this video. Filming will begin in January. It is hoped that this will help students to be more aware of their personal safety, particularly for students off-campus with reports suggesting Burglary rates have doubled in Greenstead recently.
* There have been a few incidents reported of girls drinks being spiked. This appears to be occurring whilst they are drinking in their flats prior to going out to the venues.
* The SU will also be working with the Police to try to catch dealers before they enter the venues including the possible use of Police Dogs.

Advice Centre – Sian Lovesy

* SL stated it has been a busy term so far for the Advice Centre. The majority of enquiries have been related to International Students Tier 4 visa extensions.
* Approx 30 volunteer receptionists were recruited who have been helping run the Advice Centre reception which has proved extremely helpful. Recruitment of Volunteer Advisers is underway and training will take place throughout the Spring Term.
* As mentioned in the last meeting the Advice Centre has taken on the running of the SU Prescription service. Students and Staff will need to bring their prescription scripts to the Advice Centre before 12pm these will then be collected and delivered back to the Advice Centre hopefully the same afternoon. This service has been running from the Advice Centre since October and seems to be a popular service. SL confirmed that any medications delivered are stored in a locked safe until collected.
* Next term is likely to see an increase in housing enquiries. Housing Workshops will be running every Wednesday during Term 2 from 2-3pm in room TC2.8.
1. **Christmas Arrangements:**

This item was dropped from the Agenda as had already been discussed by AA during the service updates.

1. **Retention – AJ on behalf of SSO**

AJ gave an overview of the issue on behalf of SSO. AJ explained that Katie Rakow was recruited last year into the position of Student Retention Officer. The aim being to increase the retention rates at the University of Essex. Katie has been working to gather information, particularly to discover the ‘at risk’ groups. She has been surveying students who have intermitted or withdrawn. The research so far suggests the most at risk are Mature Students, students who disclose disabilities and those who enrolled through clearing or non-traditional routes. It was found that the most common time to leave is during the first term or around the Christmas period, largely the reasons listed are academic. The research will also look to find out why people stay (e.g. for the course, due to friendship groups etc).

An implementation group has been set up and it is looking to develop a timeline of good practice and to try to identify the gaps that can lead to disengagement, for example, some students have stated they wish to be more involved before they start the course, i.e. through reading lists etc.

1. **Freshers’ Review – AJ on behalf of SSO**

AJ explained that alongside the retention work, Paulo Rothero has been working with the Freshers Planning Group to review and access Fresher’s provisions and events. This year saw lots of events, both academic and compulsory and more social activities such as SU events. There will be a review day taking place in January with the intention of looking at whether Freshers works in its current format; is it fit for purpose and does it result in engaged, interactive students? This group will also be informed by the Retention work.

1. **Alcohol Use and Impact – AJ on behalf of SSO**

AJ reported that 18 months ago work had begun to encourage non-alcohol related activities and an action plan has been introduced for activities that can be implemented. Some of these activities have already started to take place throughout the Freshers campaign. The group have been reviewing all issues felt from staff and students and the next meeting is due to take place in January. They will be reviewing the changes that have taken place this year. LF confirmed that there had been a massive positive response with excellent turnout at the non-alcohol related activities that had taken place during the first term such as the Total Wipeout House event. PB agreed that they had less alcohol related issues being reported to the Multi-Faith Chaplaincy.

1. **Multi-faith Chaplaincy Review – AJ on behalf of SSO and PB/JM on behalf of Multi-Faith Chaplaincy**

AJ reported, that Julia Murphy (present) has now taken up her position. A review has been agreed by the Steering Group to look at ensuring the MFCC constitution is integrated with the University Rules and Regulations. JM and PB stated that discussions with Chaplaincy users have been positively received and there has been a positive step towards building the lines of communication. The possibility of the MFCC joining the University’s HR and ID system had been discussed at the last meeting.

1. **Wellbeing Service – AJ on behalf of SSO**

AJ reported that there has been a change in the way students can access the service. There is now drop-in sessions available at Student Support. These had a slow start but seem to be picking up momentum towards the end of term. These drop-in sessions allow students to talk with someone immediately and for a risk assessment to be carried out as to how quickly a student should be referred. They can also discuss options available with students. Anyone who wishes to contact the service should do so via the email address wellbeing@essex.ac.uk.

A ‘Mindfullness Course’ is due to be set up in the New Year. Please see further information attached for details of the group as sent on by Jo Wilson. Any interested participants should contact wellbeing@essex.ac.uk or call 01206 873133.

1. **Any Other Business**

AJ - Student Centre – The 1st floor will house many of the student centred services such as Registry, Accommodation, Finance and Student Support. It will provide one central point for students to be directed to. Work is currently being conducted to look at how these services can best be integrated and how to streamline the processes to make better use of the available technology.

JM asked a question regarding the procedures for following up with students such as the girl who was assaulted earlier in the term. PH explained that the Police were involved from a criminal point of view. The student is also contacted via the Student Support service but it is up to the student/victim as to how much support they wish to access. JM asked whether the Multi-Faith Chaplaincy could be included in the options presented to students. AJ confirmed that all options for support services on campus are made available to students.

1. **Date of next meeting**

It was agreed that another meeting would be scheduled for next term. Further details of this are to be provided at a later date.

**ACTION POINTS:**

1. **ALL** - If anyone has any topics to be discussed please forward to fjharvey@essex.ac.uk as soon as possible.