

# The Student Experience at Edge Hill University

## Introduction

*“We are Edge Hill University*

*A fascinating place to learn, a welcoming place to live and an inspiring place to achieve your goals.*

*Our aim, in everything we do, is to give you the best quality student experience we can.*

*We will challenge you, support you and give you the right opportunities to develop academically and personally, so that you graduate fully prepared for the future”*

Many universities say that they put students at the heart of what they do. At Edge Hill we really mean it – and we put this ethos into action with unique passion and creativity.

Our culture is strongly student-centred. We work in close partnership with students to ensure our strategies, policies and procedures are designed with students at their centre. Continual reflection on how our practices impact upon the student experience is a key aspect of our culture. Our Student Journey Project enhances systems and processes across the entire University, improving the student experience from first enquiry through to graduation.

Our integrated approach to the student experience recognises the equal importance of high-quality teaching and personalised support, the provision of excellent physical and digital resources and an emphasis on the role of extracurricular opportunities for personal development. Our investment in the physical environment aims not only to create the most effective formal learning spaces, but to provide an environment that is welcoming and supportive to maximise student engagement and wellbeing. Every investment we make to enhance the student experience seeks to provide the very best value for students.

We want to ensure students are retained, satisfied and successful and to achieve this our strategy is to create an environment which provides a high-quality experience for all students and delivers:

- An educationally rewarding experience
- A welcoming, community experience
- A positive experience in a supportive environment
- An enhanced experience that extends beyond study

These strategic aims align with those used in the Student Charter, the document which sets out the responsibilities staff and students have to each other. The Charter details the behaviours whereas this document details strategic priorities and operational examples of how we bring the student experience to life.

This is a snapshot in time. We are confident that we deliver an outstanding student experience but know that we can always do more. That’s why in each strategic chapter you will find a ‘What Next’ section detailing ambitions to enhance the student experience even further. Measures of success are included so we can evaluate progress.

The Student Voice is key to ensuring that we continue to improve. We want to hear students' comments and suggestions and use these to shape future provision. If you are an Edge Hill student and have views about the strategic priorities and aims set out in this document please do get in touch at [StudentExperience@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:StudentExperience@edgehill.ac.uk) we look forward to hearing from you and very much value your contribution to University life.

Lynda Brady  
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience)

(Insert photograph)

## An educationally rewarding experience

We are committed to providing an educationally rewarding experience for our students. High quality, research-led teaching and learning is at the heart of this commitment. Edge Hill is home to students who are motivated and engaged and a staff of academics and professionals who are dedicated to helping students succeed. The University has outstanding teaching, learning and research facilities and our programmes are informed and delivered by staff who are engaged in up to date teaching and research activity.

Our staff tailor their guidance and support to each student and provide meaningful, constructive and timely feedback on academic work. We support students to learn, improve and achieve, but it is their responsibility for acting on feedback for future submissions and to enhance their skills and knowledge. We encourage our students to work to the best of their ability, take ownership of their learning and engage with all aspects of their course.

### **Strategic priority areas and description of experience**

#### **Learning and Teaching strategy**

We deliver learning and teaching of the highest possible quality. Our Learning and Teaching Strategy details the ways in which students are challenged and stretched while being supported to progress and achieve their full potential.

Students deserve the best quality teaching. We want to unleash their potential, maximise their love of learning and help them experience success from university through to graduation and employment. Our strategy aims to realise this vision and help students become confident, resilient and adaptable individuals who are highly employable. We are committed to producing graduates who will become role models and leaders in the workplace and their communities.

The strategy is underpinned by building digital skills for the future and at the heart of this is Learning Edge which is the University's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). This provides easy access to all course content in addition to a range of tools which support the delivery of teaching and learning and skills development for all students.

## **Assessment and Feedback**

High quality assessment and feedback is integral to the teaching and learning experience. Given the diversity of the student body, inclusive assessment is an essential part of our approach. Assessment is not viewed solely as an end point, but as an integral element of the learning journey, aiding student development, progression and attainment. The concept of assessment both *of* and *for* learning is strongly embedded within the student experience strategy and practice.

Staff are keen to develop students' assessment literacy, to ensure they understand the purpose and forms of assessment, how judgements are reached and how grades and feedback align with intended learning outcomes. This supports students to make more effective use of feedback, helping them improve their own learning and future performance.

*"The feedback my tutors give on my work is also very useful as this helps me then to make my work better in the future and it also shows me where I may be going wrong, I can then ask for help on this to make it better"*

## **Curriculum design**

Curriculum design is an integral part of the student learning experience and is the cornerstone for academic rigour and active student engagement. In recognition of its importance, we invest substantial effort in this area.

New programme proposals describe the student journey from application to induction, and from transition through to completion and employment or further study. We develop courses in areas of employer need and course teams seek feedback from employers, professional bodies, graduates and current students to ensure programme content is appropriate. This approach ensures our curriculum is appropriately informed by the latest research, practice and employer insights.

We operate a panel-based validation process to review new programmes, consider programme structure and understand how students will be taught, assessed and supported.

*"The support throughout each module is well scaffolded and as you gain confidence in your studies less academic support is provided, encouraging more independent study."*

## **Academic study skills**

Our UniSkills portfolio of workshops and self-guided activities is designed to maximise student potential. It is suitable for students at all points of their university life, whether starting their first assignment or referencing their final dissertation. Uniskills can help students understand their own study habits and preferences, enabling them to study effectively and develop confidence and independence. UniSkills offers:

*"The lectures I have had on study skills, such as learning how to reference and how to plan essays, have also given me the tools I needed to help me complete my first assignment without any major worries"*

## Case study

### TEF Gold

The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) is a government-led system which assesses the quality of teaching in universities. Universities are classified gold, silver or bronze. These ratings are determined by core metrics based on teaching, academic support and progression to employment.

In the first year of TEF, Edge Hill was awarded Gold with assessors finding Edge Hill to be *“delivering consistently outstanding teaching, learning and outcomes for its students.”*

The TEF Gold award means our provision is of the highest quality in the UK.

### What Next?

- We will create even more opportunities for students to feedback on their experience of learning and teaching
- We will continue to make improvements in technology to ensure aspects of learning which are online are of the highest quality
- We will ensure assessment design takes account of the changing ways of working and produce an institutional assessment strategy
- We will increase opportunities for students to receive academic support using a range of methods

### Measures of success

- Consistently high NSS ratings for Teaching on My Course, Learning Opportunities, Assessment & Feedback, Academic Support & Student Voice
- High proportion of good degrees
- Exceed student retention benchmarks
- Highly collaborative teams with evidence of cross-departmental working to enable a seamless student journey

## A welcoming, community experience

Edge Hill is first and foremost a community and one comprised of students, staff and local people. Our welcoming, friendly ethos translates into a culture based on respect, dignity, understanding and inclusivity. We want our students to get off to the best possible start, so we provide a range of schemes to help ease the transition into university life.

*“I have happily settled into Edge Hill, due to support from tutors, my friendships and the sense of community on and off campus between students.”*

## **Strategic priority areas and description of experience**

### **Pre-arrival support**

We offer an online Applicant Mentoring Scheme, matching applicants with current first or second year students. This provides an informal place where applicants can ask any questions and benefit from the experiences of their mentor who recently went through the application process themselves, helping them to quickly feel part of the Edge Hill community and more confident about starting with us.

Our Getting Started campaign sends timely, supportive and easy to understand communications providing key dates and deadlines, pre-course preparation and other helpful details to undergraduate and PGCE applicants. Communications are sent in print and email format along with a centralised 'Getting Started' website that contains everything they need to know – from how to apply for accommodation and what to pack, to suggested reading lists and how to complete online enrolment. The aim is to ensure that students, and parents, have direct access to all key pre-start information before they arrive in September.

### **Accommodation**

Our on-campus accommodation is at the heart of our vibrant on-campus community, providing a safe environment in which new students can live, study and socialise. Our halls are consistently recognised by our students as being the best in the sector and great value for money, with a range of rooms and catering packages available. We have great facilities on campus including two shops, a launderette and a beach! Everything students need is just a few minutes' walk.

### **Campus environment**

Continued investment and innovation set us apart as an award-winning place to live as well as a motivational place to learn. Our campus environment is rooted in providing a safe, vibrant and inclusive space to inspire and nurture students. State-of-the-art learning facilities are complemented by a first-class portfolio of accommodation and catering alongside sports and leisure services set within the 160-acre estate. Modern and welcoming, the green-field campus environment offers a brilliant, creative and social experience, providing a holistic approach to learning and living which promotes health, wellbeing and achievement.

Our Campus Environment can be split into two areas:

- *State of the art learning:* Multi-million-pound investment in buildings and facilities such as our showcase Library and IT facilities ensure that students have an optimal learning environment. Students benefit from 24/7 opening, increased study spaces and career support services all within walking distance from campus accommodation.
- *Award-winning living:* 2,500 single study rooms supported by housekeeping, maintenance and grounds services provide students with high quality, safe and secure accommodation - enhancing independent living.

### **Resolving issues**

We aim to resolve problems through open two-way communication and, when necessary, use fair, transparent and accessible procedures to resolve issues at the earliest opportunity. We value feedback from our students and seek to act on learning opportunities as they arise.

### **Students' Union clubs and societies**

Student Societies are an important part of student engagement within the SU. There are in excess of 60 active societies, all of which are student led and cover a wide range of interests, from academic societies through to performance, hobby and interest groups. Societies are run by internally elected committees, who are provided with support and guidance from the Student Union's Activities Team throughout the academic year. The SU hosts an annual Society Awards Night to recognise the work of the societies and its individual members; any student or member of university staff can submit a nomination. Additionally, there is a termly society social where members can meet each other, exchange ideas and get to know the Activities Team.

*"Student life at Edge Hill is made to be the top priority, the Students' Union work tirelessly to put on activities and events that can support students."*

### **Case study**

#### **Induction**

Starting university is an exciting time but moving into higher education can also be a challenging transition, so we provide our students with an extended induction to help them settle in, make new friends and receive all the information they need in their initial days and weeks at university.

Prior to arrival we ask our undergraduate first years to complete our Getting to Know You survey- we want to understand our students' previous academic experiences, expectations and motivations so our academic departments can tailor activity to address anxieties or areas for development that students have identified.

Our shared reading scheme, The Big Read, provides our new undergraduate students something in common and a talking point before they arrive on campus. Students and staff from across the university are encouraged to engage in the Big Read through the provision of additional 'campus copies' so that the scheme is something the whole community can get involved with.

Of The Big Read:

"I thought it was great, gave me a really good feel before starting and shows how student centred the University is"

"A really nice gift and surprise to ease the nerves of coming to university. It's a great icebreaker idea and I've already spoken with a few people about the book so a great conversation starter!"

#### **What next?**

- We will continue to invest in the campus environment, both physical and virtual, to ensure students can access the highest quality facilities
- We will ensure Learning Communities within Academic Departments flourish
- We will create more opportunities for pre-arrival activities and learning

**Measures of success**

- Consistently high NSS ratings for Learning Community
- Ever developing campus environment
- Recognition in awards and across the sector
- Collaborative services who work together across organisational boundaries to enhance the student experience

**A positive experience in a supportive environment**

We want all our students to achieve their full potential and have a positive experience of University life. To help this happen, we offer a range of services to support our students throughout their journey, from admission to graduation and beyond.

Our staff are committed to supporting students in their academic, personal and professional development. We also support emotional and physical health and wellbeing in a variety of ways.

*“From my time at university so far, I have understood how much help there is for students. If there are any issues, from the smallest issue to the largest, I know I can either go to my personal tutor, to one of my lesson tutors and to anyone in Catalyst. It has been made so clear how much help there is available to students and I am really fortunate about this as I have met with my tutor many times and been able to ask for advice in Catalyst”*

**Strategic priority areas and description of experience**

**Personal Tutor model**

We provide a well-planned, monitored and evaluated personal tutor system which impacts students’ sense of belonging, cohort identity, personal development and academic success. All our students are assigned a personal tutor as their main point of contact and key source of guidance and support for their academic and pastoral needs.

Personal tutors operate within a clear framework of threshold standards and undergo training to ensure they provide high quality support to their students.

Although there are clear institutional expectations, personal tutors tailor their approach to ensure the individual needs of each student are effectively met. As well as providing academic and

pastoral support personal tutors are a student's key interface with central services. Students meet regularly with their tutors as part of taking responsibility for their own learning.

*"My tutors have been amazing with regard to support offered. They really do go the extra mile in caring about our wellbeing and academic performance"*

### **Wellbeing**

We strive to ensure our students are healthy and happy. To realise this ambition, our wellbeing team offer a range of support and advice on any issue affecting a student.

The wellbeing team can provide access to specialist counselling, therapeutic work or involve the Campus Life team where appropriate – finding the right intervention for each student is the team's focus. Students can make an appointment to meet the team, or drop in for a confidential, non-judgemental discussion. Sometimes, an initial face-to-face meeting can feel overwhelming, so we also offer the online service Let Us Know. This allows students to refer themselves or raise concerns about others who may be struggling and can be used anonymously.

*"The counsellors on campus are extremely friendly and approachable. I have received a few sessions with one counsellor during a hard period in the summer and they were helpful in my dealing with university work while battling my home life also."*

*"Support is fantastic. Every issue that I have had has been dealt with compassionately and professionally."*

### **Money advice**

We are keen to eliminate any barriers which prevent students from achieving their full potential. If these barriers are financial, students can turn to our Money Advice team who provide advice and guidance on a range of financial issues. This includes budgeting, difficulties accessing student loans and dealing with unexpected financial emergencies. The team offer expert, non-judgmental advice to help solve financial issues and allow students to stay focused on their studies. The Money Advice team also offer advice and information about the Student Support Fund. This fund offers help for eligible students with serious financial difficulties or whose access to higher education is impacted due to financial reasons.

### **Thinking of Leaving**

It is important that students have a positive experience and we do all we can to make sure they are well supported throughout their studies. However, we know that at certain points in their university life, some students become unsure about continuing their programme.

Our Thinking of Leaving service is a proactive initiative designed to support students to stay on course and succeed. The service encourages students who are experiencing problems to access centralised support from staff who can assist with their choices. They can also refer students to more specialist support such as money advice or mental health services. Regular, open conversations between students and staff are important, so that difficulties can be identified and dealt with early on. This is why our personal tutors and wider support services are so valuable.



They allow students to draw upon support and advice when needed and also remind students that they are not alone when they are facing decisions about their future.

*“The support is there for all students to discuss their problems and to gain the help necessary for them to continue their day to day life in the university without stressing too much about the little things”*

## **Case study**

### **Catalyst**

Home to Learning Services, Careers and Student Services, Catalyst provides a hub of help and support for our students.

The building is open 24/7, 40 weeks a year, so students can access the university library, study spaces and a range of specialist services offering advice, workshops, drop-in sessions and events.

The Catalyst Helpdesk offers frontline support and is the first stop for student enquiries. The team are available 7 days a week and provide a welcoming and knowledgeable service including onward referrals to specialist help.

Catalyst is designed to cater for all forms of study and personal preference. Students can make use of group rooms, presentation pods or individual study booths. Whether students need collaborative spaces for social working or space for quiet study, Catalyst has a wide range of options.

Complementing the space, the technology in Catalyst has high spec PCs, laptops for loan, adaptive and specialist software with support and technical advice on hand, should a student need it.

All course and research resources – books, journals and archive material – are available in Catalyst. Where a student cannot find what they need, staff members are on hand to help.

*“The new library (The Catalyst) is brilliant and has already helped me massively so far with assignments and all sorts of other things. I enjoy going in and prefer getting to University early as I love being in the calm environment and knowing I can get help in there from all the lovely staff members.”*

### **What Next?**

- We will make investments in systems to ensure staff have the best tools to support and communicate with students
- We will make further progress in devising tailored initiatives which take account of individual student characteristics in order to provide an even greater level of support
- We will create more opportunities for students to indicate how they feel they could be better supported

### **Measuring success**

- Exceed student retention benchmarks
- Consistently high NSS ratings for Learning Community, Learning Resources, Academic Support and Student Voice
- Highly collaborative teams and evidence of cross-departmental working to enable a seamless student journey
- Ever developing and enhancing campus environment

## An enhanced experience that extends beyond study

### Summary of theme

University should be a positive, life-transforming experience, with benefits reaching beyond a student's timetabled hours. Extracurricular activities across culture, sport and volunteering - whether at home or overseas - help that experience and are an essential part of our offering.

### Strategic priority areas and description of experience

#### Arts Centre

The University's Arts Centre, based on the campus, provides an extensive and diverse programme of culture and entertainment for all students. Programmed in consultation with departments and informed by student feedback, the Arts Centre offers a vibrant mix of performance, comedy, music, literature and film – work that entertains, inspires and challenges.

Free films and other activities welcome students at the outset of their courses. The arts programme is complemented by a series of free public lectures where leaders in their fields talk about current topics and debates.

#### Social opportunities

The Campus Life Team offers a variety of social activities such as That Thursday Thing, which brings students together for trips out, watching a film or just relaxing and chatting. Our Campus Connectors support this work and are on hand to offer help with settling in and making friends.

#### The SU Bar and Venue

As well as being a source of information, guidance and advice, the Students' Union offers a whole host of activities, events, teams and societies which help to make the student experience memorable. SU Bar and Venue are the centre of many activities and events – there's always something happening at one of these locations.

#### Edge Hill Sport

We provide a wide and varied activity programme to students, staff and the local community with a range of membership levels. Our 80-station fitness suite is open 12 hours a day, seven days a week. With a range of cardiovascular and fixed resistance machines and free weights, we offer something for everyone regardless of experience or goals. There's also a timetabled range of fitness classes, ranging from yoga to high impact aerobics sessions and in team sports, our offering includes badminton, netball and football.

For the more competitive, there's Team Edge Hill, which is the web hub for all our sports teams and individuals who compete in British Universities and Colleges Sport. This makes it easy to follow the progress of our sports teams with updates on fixtures, results and match reports.

#### Research institutes

The exchange of ideas fuels the knowledge and creative economy. Our three research institutes - Institute for Social Responsibility (ISR), Institute for Creative Enterprise (ICE) and the Health Research Institute – bring this to life in an annual Festival of Ideas. The festival is an opportunity to share concepts, swap insights and trade opinions at local, national and international levels.

Previous festivals have explored communication, reciprocity, and transactions in a range of areas, from policy-making to healthcare, social enterprise to cultural production.

### **Careers & Employability**

We want our students to be work-ready when they graduate. To support them we offer an expanding range of employability and extra-curricular opportunities, designed to develop and enhance their professional and social skills. These include:

- Opportunities to become a volunteering ambassador, complete the Edge Hill Volunteering Award or be nominated for Student Volunteer of the Year
- A unique online skills and personal reflective activity tool to help students identify, develop and enhance their employability skills
- Part time job opportunities, including jobs on campus and placements. A variety of careers events give students the opportunity to network and engage with employers and alumni

To support our graduates compete successfully for graduate employment we offer career masterclasses, online aptitude testing and interview practice. We continue our support by offering our alumni careers advice, work and volunteering opportunities for up to three years after graduation.

### **Graduation**

We never forget that graduation is the pinnacle of a student's journey with us. At the heart of the Graduation team's work is the focus on providing a memorable experience on this important day. While we have well-honed systems and processes to ensure graduation week runs smoothly, we also create bespoke arrangements to cater for any accessibility or special requirements. The day itself balances formal pomp and ceremony with inclusive and informal social activity. Complimentary live screening makes the ceremonies inclusive and accessible for as many guests as possible.

### **Alumni**

All our graduates automatically become lifelong members of the University's Alumni Network, a free service with ongoing benefits including access to the University Library, discounted membership of the Sports Centre and expert advice on postgraduate and professional development courses, and reduction in course fees for eligible alumni.

Our campus networking events give alumni the opportunity to meet, develop relationship-building skills and enhance their career prospects. To maintain the connection, alumni are invited to a wide range of University events throughout the year – including the annual Alumni Catch-up Day. Alumni are involved in curriculum design to help keep our courses up-to-date and industry relevant, and regularly return to campus to deliver talks, mentoring and industry insights.

### **Case study**

*Student Opportunities & SOF*

We want to help students build their confidence, take on fresh challenges, develop skills and have new experiences. They can do this by getting involved with all the student opportunities that exist here at Edge Hill.

Our opportunities can be split into four themes:

- *Industry Links* - enables students to understand and meet employers' expectations in areas such as commercial awareness, enterprise and leadership.
- *Going Global* – helps students internationalise their CV and show they have global awareness, from learning a language through to studying abroad.
- *Developing You*- provides students with activities to learn essential skills that are as useful in life as they are in the workplace, from managing pressure to communicating confidently.
- *Getting Active*- offers students opportunities that support fitness and wellbeing as well as meet new people and try new physical activities.

The Student Opportunity Fund is available to support students financially to engage in employability enhancing activity.

*Performing Arts 3rdEdge dance company trip to New York (launch of Oxford Handbook of Dance and Wellbeing)*

*"I enjoyed everything about the trip, it was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity. The Student Opportunity Fund completely made this possible for us. To be able to network and discuss arts related topics with people at the event, some of whom I know as authors and practitioners, was amazing."*

#### **What next?**

- We will create more opportunities for students to access the workplace
- We will build upon the student opportunities workstream to give students access to new experiences

#### **Measures of success**

- Higher % of students in graduate level employment
- Increased engagement with Student Opportunities and the SOF
- Collaborative services who work together across organisational boundaries to enhance the student experience
- Increased attendance at Arts Centre events