

**Wednesday
afternoons
free
from
classes**



Wednesdays

Introduction

The student experience at the University of Glasgow is about much more than academia.

The Students' Representative Council (SRC) and the Sports Association (GUSA) believe that the University should guarantee that students will have Wednesday afternoons without classes to increase retention, increase the skill-set of current students, and therefore further enhance the image and standing of the University.

The University of Glasgow has already recognised that extra- and co-curricular activities are essential in ensuring a well-rounded graduate. They have spent a significant amount of time increasing the number of extra-curricular activities available, and increasing the ways students can record their activities; through the development of Personal Development Planning and the Bologna transcript.

The SRC and GUSA believe that the skills and attributes developed through representing the University at sporting events; working with the community in volunteering; and involvement in clubs and societies, all contribute to the graduate attributes that make Glasgow University graduates appealing to employers.

Soft skills such as communication, leadership and time management, that are developed through greater social interaction, are also invaluable in ensuring that students emerge as well-rounded ambassadors for Higher Education, and, more importantly, for the University of Glasgow.

Glasgow University is already ranked 73rd amongst Higher Education institutions worldwide and is widely recognised for its significant levels of student satisfaction through results from the National Student Survey and the International Student Barometer. Recent nominations for Best International Student Support and Best Student Experience at the Times Higher Education Awards are a testament to Glasgow's success in ensuring confident, happy students, and being named Sunday Times University of the Year further strengthened Glasgow's appeal and reputation as a top institution.

for Students

This booklet seeks to highlight the benefits, for both the University and its students, of having Wednesday afternoons free from classes in order to develop employability skills and other key graduate attributes through volunteering, sport, and engagement in clubs and societies.

Enhancing Employability

A degree alone is no longer enough to secure graduate-level employment. The Government has set a target of 50% of young people going to University by 2010 (achieving around 43% as of 2005). The number of graduates entering employment has therefore dramatically increased and will rise further still; given the limitations of the current degree classification system it is becoming increasingly difficult for qualified candidates to stand out from the crowd.

The University has taken a number of steps to acknowledge this through the development of the Employability Strategy, the PDP Policy and a more recent focus on work related learning. These strategies emphasise the importance of developing employability skills through study to enhance students' learning experience and their academic achievement, whilst also preparing them for employment or further study after graduation.

The University of Glasgow has also been very proactive in engaging with employers to ensure students are meeting the expectations of graduate recruiters. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) recently criticised the quality of University graduates, saying that they 'lack basic communication skills'. Feedback gathered from University employer focus groups in May 2008 echoed the CBI's concerns, with many participants stating that 'Glasgow graduates lack communication skills and confidence' (KPMG).

We believe that it is essential for the enhancement of Glasgow University graduate attributes that time is allocated within university hours to allow students to engage in the wide range of extra-curricular activities that will develop these skills.

Volunteering

There are currently 446 students involved in volunteering through the SRC Student Volunteer Support Service (SVSS), with over 100 more on waiting lists. These students are actively involved in the University and its surrounding communities through programmes such as Classroom Support, Buddy a Granny, Splash Sports Coaching, Help the Homeless and Conversational English.

Volunteering is an excellent opportunity for students to develop the transferable soft skills desirable across a wide range of disciplines and professions. Evidence has shown that graduates with volunteering experience possess better communication skills, are better able to articulate their team-working abilities, and display greater confidence overall as a result: a key area in which our graduates are lacking (see focus group findings above). Volunteering not only provides students with a well-developed CV, but also demonstrates to employers that they are highly motivated and organised individuals.

"Volunteers are amongst those who are more likely to have "sparkle", the self-confident, self-aware, unafraid individuals who look at your face when you are interviewing them as they have more confidence and more to talk about"

- Linsey Perry, Graduate Recruiter, Network Rail

Such is the value placed on volunteering experience that it can even be a decisive factor in a graduate's employment. A TimeBank survey found that 73% of employers would employ a candidate with volunteering experience over a candidate without. Employers surveyed also thought that volunteering can be more beneficial than paid employment (58%), and 94% of employers agreed that volunteering helps to build key employability skills.

Volunteering furthermore gives students a chance to provide demonstrable examples of their acquisition of these key skills, another area which our graduate employers identify as problematic:

"At KPMG we see at first hand the advantages that volunteering brings to our graduate applicants. Our interviews are all competency based and that means we look for examples of how a student has demonstrated they possess the skills and

abilities we look for. Whether it be team working, leadership or accountability there are few better ways of gaining the skills that employers need than via volunteering.”

- Keith Dugdale, Director of Recruitment and Resourcing, KPMG UK

It has been acknowledged in several government reports that lack of time is a significant barrier to entry for many young people wanting to volunteer, and that, as such, employers and universities should strive to provide greater flexibility. With significant numbers of students now engaging in part-time work during term time to fund their studies, volunteering is often seen as a luxury that students don't have time to indulge in. Setting aside designated time for volunteering will mean more students are likely to participate, and the University will benefit from a better quality of graduate as a result.

‘Many young adults find it difficult to find time to volunteer but we know that volunteering while young can instil a pattern for life.’

– Morgan Inquiry

Universities not only have a responsibility to promote high academic achievement in their students, but also to encourage their personal development. Volunteering both raises job aspirations and encourages a structured approach to gaining relevant career experience. This in turn could encourage more students to engage with our other PDP, employability and work-related learning opportunities.

Career awareness was also highlighted as a concern for Glasgow graduates:

“Numerous GU applicants apply for certain positions but do not get through the first interview stage because of weak career motivation and lack of awareness of their chosen career path”

– University Employer Focus Group, May 2008

‘Links Between Volunteering and Employability’ found that students are increasingly using volunteering as a way to gain relevant experience and an entry into their chosen discipline.

Performance in Sport and Health

With the greater flexibility afforded for volunteering activity by having Wednesday afternoons free from classes, Glasgow students can be expected to graduate with stronger career focus and the ability to demonstrate relevant skills and experience in an interview situation. Post-study employment rates may well go up as a result of this and further enhance the university's strong reputation for producing quality graduates.

Glasgow University has a strong history of sporting excellence: it was ranked in the top 20% of Universities in the UK in the British Universities and Colleges Sport League (BUCS formerly BUSA); its basketball and squash teams finished first in their respective championships in 2007; and the University of Glasgow Rowing team were one of only two UK Universities to represent Great Britain at the European Universities Regatta in 2008. Although these are significant achievements, there remains great potential for development and improvement.

If we are to remain competitive it is crucial that time is allocated within the University timetable for training and competition as there is at many other Universities. All the top 10 Universities in the UK for sporting achievement enjoy Wednesday afternoons free from classes, and Glasgow is in the minority of the Russell Group who do not allocate time for sport or recreation. This forms a significant barrier to increase sporting success for Glasgow University students.

On an average week 26 of the possible 31 Glasgow University sports clubs are active in competitive sports on a Wednesday afternoon. Every week around 40% of Glasgow students are unable to represent the university on Wednesday afternoons due to scheduling clashes between classes and sporting fixtures. While some departments are happy to accommodate reasonable changes due to these clashes, there is still a significant number of students who are forced to choose between missing sporting fixtures – missing classes, limiting either their sporting or academic potential. For a University committed to both strong educational achievement and personal development, this is not an acceptable situation.

Having a highly competitive sports programme can be an invaluable recruitment tool

for the University. Within Scotland, Edinburgh and Stirling are both rated within the top 10 UK Universities for sport, and 5 of the top 10 UK Universities for sport are within the Russell Group. To not be included in these ratings could harm Glasgow's recruitment potential. Potential students who compete at a high skill-level will likely choose their University on the ability to continue such involvement. These students already had to balance education and their sporting commitments and therefore are highly driven: they are precisely the type of students that could benefit the University greatly.

There are strong links between sport and recreation and positive mental health. Students are disproportionately affected by mental health complications which can negatively affect their academic studies and have an impact on those around them.

“There is evidence, particularly from the evaluation of student counselling services that the number of higher education students presenting with symptoms of mental ill health has increased in recent years.”

– The Mental Health of Students in Higher Education, Royal College of Physicians, 2003

Since this is a growing problem, it is important that the University provides opportunities and services to students in order to minimise this risk. Glasgow already provides excellent services such as the Student Counselling and Advisory Service to assist students once problems have occurred. Ensuring Wednesday afternoons are free from classes will encourage more students to take part in sport and recreation and may consequently help prevent mental health problems from occurring.

“There is widespread support for a positive and lasting relationship between participation in regular exercise and various indices of mental health (...) several studies have reported a positive association between participation in exercise and enhanced mental health.”

– ‘Exercise therapy and mental health in clinical populations: is exercise therapy a worthwhile intervention?’ Daley 2002

Mental health problems often occur due to the particular stresses of Higher Education, the emotional demands of living away from home for some, a less structured

environment for others, financial pressures, and feelings of isolation. While these difficulties will never be entirely overcome, involvement in sport and recreation can provide a positive outlet for stress.

“Crucially for those troubled by mental health problems, exercise can also be a social outlet, minimising the common feeling of social isolation.”

– Mental Health – Sports Council for Wales

The cultivation of a University community, and encouraging involvement in various activities such as sport and recreation, can have a positive impact on student welfare and retention figures.

Clubs and Societies

There are currently over 9000 individuals involved in SRC- and GUSA- affiliated student groups, comprising over 50 clubs and societies and 46 sports clubs. All 9000 students can benefit from the range of social interaction and support which peer groups and societies can provide. In addition there are also hundreds of students who are actively involved in the running and organisation of these societies, gaining valuable experience in everything from events management to club finance, and developing skills including book keeping, minute taking and effective leadership.

Managers of clubs and societies benefit greatly from their experience through the development of soft skills such as timekeeping, organisation and effective communication: these same skills are in high demand by our graduate employers.

“Students can develop business relevant skills through clubs and societies. From a retail perspective, leadership and team working are crucial competencies, and these can often be demonstrated by students who have had specific roles within societies.”

- Emma Fripp, Arcadia Group Resourcing Manager

Clubs and societies further develop the sense of a university community, particularly so when aligned to a particular faculty or department. This is vital to the long-term integration of students and the development of informal peer support: university departments with high retention levels often have a strong associated student society. The use of Wednesday afternoons for personal development activity would allow a wider pool of students to benefit from engagement with clubs and societies on campus.

“As a home and postgraduate student being able to join the Departmental Law Society was a great way to meet people, and become more involved with life at the University”
– David Matheson, PG Law Student

There is also significant evidence that engagement with clubs and societies enhances integration and promotes a multicultural campus supportive of equality and diversity. Glasgow’s faith and belief societies regularly hold joint events to promote discussion, debate and respect for others’ views, and the International Society (the largest student society on campus) is key to the induction, community support and wider integration of our international student populace into the university community.

As the Glasgow student community becomes ever larger and more diverse it is important that all students are catered for and supported. Setting aside dedicated time on Wednesday afternoons for clubs and societies’ activity will not only encourage the holding of events on campus rather than at potentially more inconvenient or off-putting pub venues, but will also ensure that these meetings are not competing with other out of hours commitments such as part-time work or childcare: this will appeal to a wider section of the student body and particularly benefit those who are traditionally less likely to engage in clubs and societies including student parents, mature students, PG students and international students.

Conclusion

The University highly values extra- and co- curricular activities. This document sets out an opportunity to increase the competitiveness of University of Glasgow graduates, and for the University to enhance its reputation in comparison with its competitors. Offering an excellent and diverse student experience is essential in the current Higher Education sector due to greater competition from other Universities.

➤ Wednesday afternoons free from classes, and the benefits associated with these, would offer the University a key selling point as it strives to become a fully-selecting University. A reputation as a 'sector leader' for excellence in sport, volunteering and extra-curricular activities would be greatly beneficial to both the University and its students.

➤ Wednesday afternoons free from classes will allow greater numbers of students to involve themselves with the University and the University experience. The University of Glasgow's retention figures compare unfavourably with Russell Group peers, and much of this is linked to the high number of students from within the Greater Glasgow area. These students are often unable to dedicate as much time as they would like to integration with the wider university community due to travel concerns; such students feel fewer ties to the University and are more likely to withdraw from the University as a result. Providing a time where all students will be available to engage with the University or their peers is a key way to encourage students to get involved.

➤ Wednesday afternoons free from classes would enable the University to compete at a much higher sporting level and use this enhanced reputation to raise its profile in key recruitment areas. It would also ensure an increased number of students have the opportunity to be involved in physical activity which would create a student population which is both mentally and physically strong.

➤ Essential to the University is the success of its graduates. Graduate employers are looking for more evidence of achievement than a degree, and providing time

within the University working day for students to develop key employability skills will enhance the attributes of its graduates, and consequently increase the reputation of the University.

Ensuring Wednesday afternoons are free from classes will not be an easy task, but will deliver real benefits to students at the University of Glasgow – and showing such dedication to the development of students will greatly enhance the university in the eyes of potential students at home and abroad.

STUDENTS' REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL
UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW



For more information go to:

[www.glasgowstudent.net/
events/wednesdays](http://www.glasgowstudent.net/events/wednesdays)

