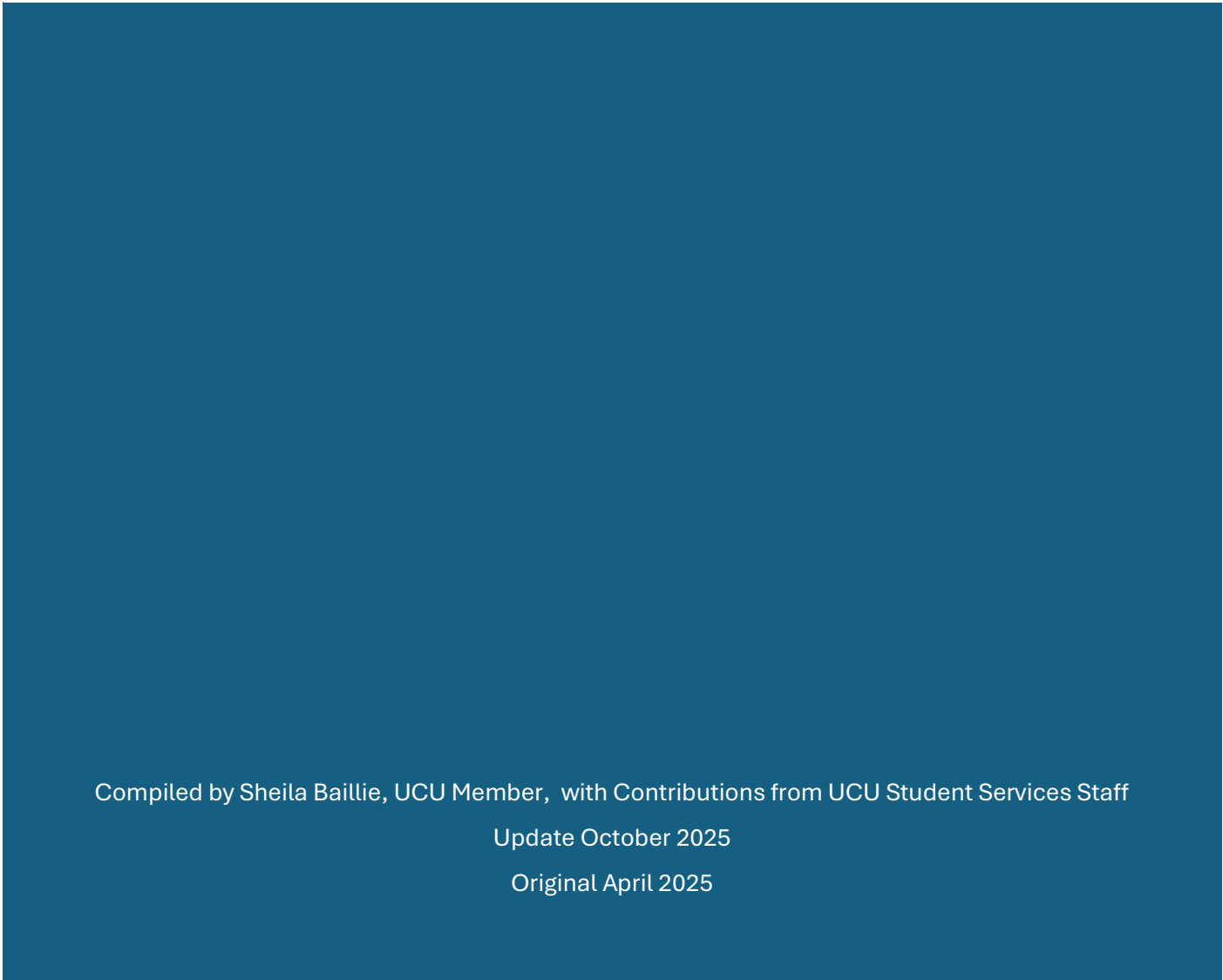




The Strategic Value of University of Dundee Student Services in Supporting a Diverse Scottish Student Population



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Update October 2025

Original April 2025

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October 2025 Update to Report

Since November 2024, the University of Dundee has been navigating a financial crisis following the reported £35 million deficit. Although the Scottish Funding Council raised questions regarding the proposed UoD recovery plan that was presented for review in August 2025, that same plan now appears to be going ahead with significant restructuring across Professional Services. This has caused understandable uncertainty among staff, particularly as communication and consultation have not always been clear or consistent.

As part of the restructure, services previously aligned under Student Services have been redistributed to “better match their focus for campus life or academic success and support.” The realigned services are outlined as follows:

- Careers Service, Academic Skills, Student Funding, Chaplaincy, and Wellbeing Services (including Disability, Health Service, and Counselling) now sit within Library, Academic and Cultural Services.
- Catering, Sport and Active Health, and Residences are now part of Estates and Campus Services.
- English for International Students has moved to Global Engagement and Future Students.
- The Centre for Entrepreneurship now sits within Research and Innovation Services, while The Nursery is being managed as a special project.
- Registry will also be realigned under Library, Academic and Cultural Services by the end of November 2025.

The University UEG has described this as part of an integrated professional services model, intended to align with the four-faculty structure and encourage greater cross-directorate collaboration. However, the implications of these changes remain unclear.

Job loss estimates indicate that approximately 600 full-time equivalent (FTE) posts have already been lost through voluntary severance, unfilled vacancies and natural attrition, with plans proposed for an additional further reduction (170 voluntary and 170 compulsory). If implemented, this would result in more than 1,000 staff departures, which equates to nearly a third of the University’s workforce. The loss of institutional knowledge, lack of redeployment planning and rising workloads have placed considerable strain on remaining staff, who continue to prioritise student needs under increasingly challenging conditions.

Despite these pressures, it is important to acknowledge that the University’s league table rankings have risen significantly this year, reflecting the dedication, professionalism and resilience of staff across academic, professional and student services teams. This success has been achieved through extraordinary effort under sustained pressure. However, there is now a serious risk that continued staff reductions, burnout and the loss of specialist expertise will undermine these gains,

leading to a decline in student experience and will ultimately impact retention, reputation and future recruitment.

Concerns from professional services staff have been raised regarding transparency, equality and the potential impacts on both staff and students. Specifically, it is not evident that anyone from Student Services (directorate or otherwise) were consulted during the review, what criteria were used or evidence gathered to determine the new alignments that are stated as a better match, and whether Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) have been undertaken for staff and students. Such assessments are essential to ensure that no group is disproportionately affected and that access to support, inclusion and wellbeing are safeguarded.

Further clarity is also needed on how voluntary severance (VS) departures, unfilled roles and potential redundancies will affect service delivery, staff wellbeing and continuity of student support, particularly across essential collaborative areas including those where there are budget considerations. Limited communication about staffing changes and leadership appointments has heightened anxiety at a time when reassurance and engagement are particularly important.

Professional and Student Services teams form the anchor of the University, keeping core systems operational whilst ensuring that students are supported in, through and out of their university journey. These teams are central to academic success, inclusion, wellbeing and retention. Clear communication, fairness and continuity of specialist support are essential, especially at times when changes take place. The University must ensure that restructuring strengthens rather than fragments the collaborative student support networks that are essential to inclusive education and student success.

Items for Consideration

1. Consultation

- Were any Student Services Directors made fully aware and included in the process?

2. Decision-Making and Alignment

- Is there awareness that the new title 'Library, Academic and Cultural Services' has no mention of students? How will students know that this is a relevant service for them?
- Similarly, is there awareness that alignment of EIS with Global Engagement and Future Students, there is no mention of current student support? How will students seeking EIS know that this service is for them?
- What criteria or evidence informed the decision that the restructure is a "better match"?

- How will alignment and effectiveness be evaluated over time?
- 3. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)
 - Have EIAs been completed for both staff and students?
- 4. Service Capacity and Staffing
 - How will the loss of staff through VS and unfilled roles be managed?
 - What measures are in place to protect service quality and staff wellbeing?
- 5. Leadership and Communication
 - When will the new Director of Library, Academic and Cultural Services engage directly with staff?
- 6. Collaboration and Continuity of Student Support
 - How will cross-team working between professional services be maintained?
 - What steps will ensure continuity of support for disabled, care-experienced, international students and other students from diverse backgrounds?

This update ends with a call for honest and open communication between University leadership and staff. Those working directly with students see the real impact of service cuts and changes on wellbeing and the student experience, and their input is essential to shaping practical and inclusive student services. Answers to the issues raised are needed with reassurance that the staff voice is included in future discussions about how professional and student services develop.

N.B.

The remainder of the report should be read in the context of the time at which it was written i.e. April 2025. Since then, there has been redundancies and job losses and teams are demonstrating remarkable versatility and ingenuity to ensure a level of service that students deserve.

The sections detailing the functions of each service, as well as the associated policy and legislative context, remain fully relevant.

Prepared for: Task Force

Date: April 2025

I. Introduction and Recommendations

This paper has been prepared to highlight the vital role of Student Services in supporting the University of Dundee's financial recovery and to raise serious concerns about the potential impact of proposed staffing reductions. Student Services demonstrate exemplary alignment with Scotland's commitments to equality, education, and mental health. The complexity and depth of student support cannot be delivered through generalist provision alone. It requires skilled, specialist teams to meet students' diverse and often complex needs and uphold the University's legal and sector obligations.

The University's current recovery plan proposes 632 FTE job losses, with approximately 70% of these affecting professional services. A significant number of these cuts fall within Professional Services, including Student Services. At the same time, the imminent departure of the Director of Student Services, with no visible succession plan and clear communication that no further information will be shared with Student Services staff, has left the service in a highly vulnerable position. Staff have noted that the absence of leadership may limit opportunities to clearly articulate the role and contributions of Student Services within the wider recovery process. This uncertainty places both students and staff at risk.

Student Services are a key partner in enabling institutional recovery, ensuring student safety, inclusion, and success. Their expertise must be recognised, protected, and integrated into the University's strategic future. Without it, the capacity to support our students and meet national and statutory commitments will be seriously undermined

We note the following:

- Dundee University has received numerous awards for best student experience, in 2019, 2020, 2022 & 2023. Winning Scottish University of the year 2025 included student experience. This allows a student recruitment opportunity, and student services will be key to this
- The job freeze implemented in November 2024 has seen the following decreases in staffing across parts of the service:
 - 29% reduction in staff for Health Service
 - 20% reduction in staff for Disability Service
 - 13.3% reduction of staff for Counselling Services
 - 5% reduction of staff for Student Services

- Most services have noted a significant increase in student demand and/or complexity of cases in recent years, causing further pressure on the services.
- Given the reputational damage of the University and the lowering of entry grades to enhance admission rates, we expect the demand for students support services to increase rather than decrease.
- Student Services have a predominantly female-based workforce, with departments having between 75% to 100% female staff.

Strategic Risks of Restructuring and Resizing

Student-Level Impacts:

- Loss of support for disabled or at-risk students, increasing non-continuation.
- Reduced mental health resilience and safety concerns.
- Disengagement from marginalised groups (e.g. care-experienced, refugees, estranged).

Staff Impacts:

- Increased pastoral workload on academic staff with no specialist training.
- Loss of institutional memory and safeguarding intelligence.

Local and NHS Impact:

- Overstretched local health, CAMHS, and social care services bear the burden.
- Breakdowns in joined-up support undermine public-sector collaboration.

Institutional Risks:

- Breach of Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty.
- Damage to university reputation and compliance with SFC outcomes.
- Failure to meet inclusion, retention, and graduate outcome targets.

Recommendations:

- Protect specialist-led services.
- Conduct thorough Equality Impact Assessments before service redesign.
- Centre student voice and lived experience in planning and evaluation.
- Note the legal obligations of service areas and the impact cuts would have on this.

- Embed Student Services as a core strategy for medium to long term recovery.

II. Wider Impact of the University of Dundee

Universities as Anchor Institutions

Scottish universities are increasingly diverse, welcoming students from a wide range of cultural, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds, including international students, care-experienced individuals, disabled students, and those from widening access routes. To ensure equity of opportunity and support student success, comprehensive and well-resourced student services are essential and generally include services such as Disability, Funding, Counselling, Health, English for International Students, Careers, and Student Wellbeing Support. Such specialist and professional services reflect a commitment to student well-being, retention, and success. This has become even more important in light of recent legal precedent arising from the Natasha Abraham/Bristol University case, which underlines institutional risk when services are not aligned.

In addition to their academic and social impact, Scottish universities serve as anchor institutions by employing large workforces, driving local economic activity, and fostering innovation through education and research. They enrich cultural life, support community engagement, and play a central role in regional development and social cohesion, as outlined in *Universities and Scotland: Time to Choose* (2023). By investing strategically in these institutions, Scotland can strengthen its commitment to inclusive education, social mobility, and economic prosperity.

University of Dundee Economic Impact

In the spring of 2022, BiGGAR Economics was commissioned to evaluate the economic impact of the University of Dundee. The resulting report, published in November, revealed that the University contributes significantly to the local economy of Dundee and the Tay Cities Region, as well as to the broader national and global economy. [The University of Dundee Economic Impact Study - BiGGAR Economics](#)

Key findings from the assessment include:

- Enhanced productivity of University of Dundee graduates, driven by the education they receive.
- The economic benefits of the University's research, which contribute to improved health outcomes.
- Direct employment generated by the University and its supply chain.
- The economic impact of attracting students who live, study, and work in the area.
- Support provided to Dundee's tourism and cultural sectors.

The University of Dundee was shown to generate £10 of Gross Value Added (GVA) for Scotland's economy for every £1 it receives from the Scottish Government.

The report highlighted the University's essential role in the city, including its contributions to the tourism sector, the development of the life sciences cluster, and the overall vitality of the population.

Student Services Anchor for Student Inclusion and Success

Student Services at the University of Dundee plays a vital role in supporting the University's economic impact by supporting student retention, wellbeing, and employability. Through specialist and professional support teams, Student Services ensures students thrive academically and personally, which in turn contributes to a more productive and engaged graduate workforce. Additionally, by fostering an inclusive and supportive environment, Student Services helps attract a diverse student body, contributing to the local economy and strengthening the University's role in the community and wider region.

III. Overview of Student Services Functions and Strategic Responsibilities

1. Statutory Requirements

Non-negotiable legal obligations placed on the university. Student Services teams deliver or lead key institutional responses to these.

- **Equality Act 2010**
The Disability Team delivers the university's core response to ensure compliance in teaching, learning, and assessment across all Schools.
- **British Sign Language (BSL) (Scotland) Act 2015**
The Disability Team is a key stakeholder in developing and implementing the university's BSL Plan.
- **Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024**
Student Support leads on the development and delivery of the university's Corporate Parenting Plan.
- **Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021**
The Student Funding Team oversees free period product provision and related menstrual health education.
- **Safeguarding Legislation**
Including Adult Support and Protection, Forced Marriage, Female Genital Mutilation, Modern Slavery Acts, and Prevent Duty. Student Support leads the university's safeguarding function.

2. Institutional Requirements

Core responsibilities derived from university strategies, policies, and operational needs where Student Services plays a lead or significant role.

- **Student Support and Transition**
Including induction, initial inquiries and signposting, support for care-experienced students, accommodation assistance, and processes for mitigating and recurring circumstances.
- **Student Safety and Welfare**
Encompassing safeguarding, student conduct and discipline, response to student deaths, support for Sanctuary Scholars, fitness to study, gender-based violence (GBV), mental health agreements (e.g., DAWS), and missing student procedures.

Operational Infrastructure

Including GDPR compliance, PVG membership and team safeguarding checks, health and safety duties, and maintenance of key IT platforms used for service delivery.

3. Sector Expectations

Areas subject to sector-wide scrutiny, where active engagement is expected of all Scottish universities.

- **Substance Misuse and Harm Reduction**
Addressing alcohol, drug use, and spiking. Student Support leads both preventative education and harm reduction efforts.
- **Tackling Discrimination and Harassment**
Including antisemitism, Islamophobia, and all forms of student misconduct—particularly racial and sexual harassment. Aligned with the Scottish Government’s Equally Safe framework.
- **Student Poverty and Hardship**
Including support mechanisms for financially vulnerable students.
- **Mental Health and Suicide Prevention**
Comprehensive support frameworks including partnerships and proactive strategies to prevent student suicide.
- **International Student Support**
Tailored support addressing welfare, transition, and compliance for international learners.
- **Widening Access and Retention**
Transition and retention support for students from widening participation backgrounds.
- **Accommodation Support**
Ongoing support for students living in university-managed or affiliated accommodation.

4. Sector Good Practice

Activities the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Universities Scotland, and other external stakeholders reasonably expect the university to demonstrate action on.

- **EHRC & Legal Precedents**
Following the University of Bristol vs Abrahart case, the Disability Team, in partnership with EDI and the Education Academy, leads on responses to the EHRC’s advice note.
- **Fitness to Study Policies**
Embedding compassionate and evidence-based fitness to study processes aligned with sector expectations.
- **OfS Taskforces (Mental Health and Sexual Misconduct)**
Although statutory in England, the Office for Students (OfS) initiatives are influencing sector-wide standards:

- The HEMHIT mental health taskforce is shaping expectations on student wellbeing, communication, and institutional responsibility.
- The OfS guidance on sexual misconduct and harassment is setting new sector standards increasingly recognised across the UK.
- **Trauma-Informed Practice**
Integration of trauma-aware approaches into student support and teaching practice is increasingly viewed as essential by sector bodies.

These frameworks require universities to take anticipatory action, implement reasonable adjustments, and ensure students are not disadvantaged due to disability, mental health, or socio-economic background. Failure to meet these duties carries legal and reputational risk.

Given this, all service changes should be subject to Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs).

IV. Student Services

UoD Student Services are a collection of specialist, student-centred teams dedicated to supporting learners throughout their university journey. These services work collaboratively to promote wellbeing, inclusion, academic success, and positive graduate outcomes, placing students' diverse needs and lived experiences at the heart of all they do. Full details of University of Dundee Students Services are available at: [Student Services | University of Dundee, UK](#). The following section provides a snapshot overview of seven University of Dundee services for students.

1. Disability Services

Disability Services is a specialist-led, complex service that drives the university's inclusive education strategy and holds legal responsibility for fulfilling the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. The team manage complex student centred and administrative work within multiple regulatory frameworks. Their work is multi-layered, specialist, and involves significant inter-agency collaboration, including funding bodies, DSA providers, NHS and private clinicians, academic departments, professional services, former educational establishments, parents and other stakeholders. Staff interpret clinical and educational evidence, uphold legal duties under the Equality Act 2010, and monitor provision of internal and external support.

Core Activities

- **Needs Assessments & Support Plans:**
 - Meeting with students and conducting detailed assessments of disability-related impact on learning.
 - Translating complex medical/psychological evidence into practical academic adjustments.
 - Producing and updating support plans and ensuring physical and content accessibility across teaching, platforms, placements and assessments. This involves liaising with academic staff and other professional services to ensure adjustments and support are in place.
- **Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA):**
 - Providing information, advice and guidance on DSA eligibility (SAAS, SFE, SFW, SFNI, NHS and Research Council) for UK students.
 - Coordinating evidence-gathering and application processes.
 - Coordinating assistive technology, ergonomic equipment, and funded Non-Medical Personal Help (NMPH) support such as:
 - Specialist SpLD tutors
 - Mental health mentors
 - Study assistants

- Communication professionals (e.g. BSL interpreters, note-takers)
- **Non-Medical Help (NMPH) Coordination and Quality Assurance:**
 - Contracting and onboarding internal/external NMPH staff.
 - Monitoring delivery, responding to safeguarding concerns and managing adjustments to provision.
 - Ensuring that funded support complies with provider frameworks and student needs.
- **Complex Case Management and Liaison:**
 - Coordinating with GPs/clinicians, CAMHS/CMHTs, psychologists, educational assessors, social work, and third sector partners.
 - Managing transitions, including delayed diagnoses, crisis referrals, and evolving conditions.
 - Hosting and contributing to multi-agency support and care planning.
- **Training and Capacity Building:**
 - Delivering student and staff training on inclusive support and anticipatory adjustments.
 - Advising on legal compliance, inclusive assessments, and digital accessibility.
 - Inputting to curriculum design to reduce need for retrofitted support.
- **Assistive Technologies and Alternative Formats**
 - Support with DSA-funded and inclusive assistive tools (e.g. text-to-speech, mind mapping, note-taking apps).
 - One-to-one and group training to build student confidence using technology for study and exams.
 - Advice on compatible tools across university systems and platforms.
 - Conversion of course materials into accessible formats (e.g. large print, audio, accessible PDFs).
 - Guidance for staff on creating inclusive content in line with accessibility regulations.
 - Collaboration with Library and IT Services to ensure access to accessible learning resources.
- **Data and Reporting:**

- Providing detailed reporting to inform governance, service improvement, and statutory returns.

Legislative and Policy Alignment

- **Equality Act 2010 (UK-wide)** [Equality Act 2010 – Legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents/enacted)

Requires higher education institutions to anticipate the needs of disabled students and take proactive steps to remove or reduce disadvantage (anticipatory duty).

Legal obligation to provide reasonable adjustments to ensure disabled students can access teaching, learning, assessment, and university life without being substantially disadvantaged.

Protects against direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.

Applies to all areas of university life, including teaching delivery, placements, digital access, and student support services.

- **The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018 (PSBAR)** [Understanding accessibility requirements for public sector bodies - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/understanding-accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-bodies)

Requires universities, as public sector institutions, to ensure their digital content is accessible to all users, particularly disabled people. This includes meeting WCAG 2.1 AA standards and publishing an accessibility statement. Compliance supports legal duties under PSBAR and the Equality Act 2010, and is essential for inclusive education to ensure students can access learning materials, services, and information without barriers.

- **A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Progress Report and Action Plan (2021–2026)**

Sets out Scotland's long-term vision for disabled people to live with dignity, respect, and equal opportunity.

Commits public bodies, including universities, to removing structural barriers and embedding inclusive practice in policy and delivery.

Reinforces the social model of disability and promotes co-production, accessible communication, and rights-based services.

A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Progress Report – Scottish Government

- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**

Ratified by the UK Government in 2009 and underpins both UK and Scottish policies.

Article 24 obliges states to ensure inclusive education systems at all levels and lifelong learning for disabled people.

Promotes full participation, reasonable accommodation, and accessibility in the design of educational systems.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>

- **Universities Scotland – Principles for Fair Admissions**

Advocates for fair and transparent admissions processes that remove barriers for disabled applicants.

Promotes contextual admissions, inclusive outreach, and support for disabled students to not just access but succeed in higher education.

Aligns with the Scottish Government's Widening Access agenda and targets for disabled student representation.

Principles for Fair Admissions – Universities Scotland

- **Scottish Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)**

Requires universities to mainstream equality and report on progress through measurable equality outcomes.

Many universities include disability inclusion, digital accessibility, and inclusive learning in their published objectives.

PSED in Scotland – EHRC

- **Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA Scotland) [QAA Scotland – Enhancement Themes](#)**

Embeds equality, diversity, and inclusion as cross-cutting themes within institutional reviews and enhancement frameworks.

Encourages student partnership and responsive curriculum design to reduce the need for retrofitted adjustments.

- **British Sign Language (BSL) (Scotland) Act 2015**

The Disability Team is a key stakeholder in developing and implementing the university's BSL Plan.

Value to the Institution

- Enables legal compliance and reputational excellence.
- Promotes equity of opportunity and student attainment.

- Improves institutional performance metrics (retention, NSS, graduate outcomes).
- Demonstrates the University commitment to inclusive practice.

Learning from the Natasha Abrahart Case

The **2022 judgment in Natasha Abrahart v University of Bristol** profoundly impacts university obligations under the Equality Act 2010. Natasha, a 20-year-old physics student with social anxiety, died by suicide after the university failed to implement reasonable adjustments or adequately coordinate internal and external support.

Key Findings:

- The university breached its duty to make reasonable adjustments for a known mental health disability.
- A lack of joined-up internal support and failure to communicate risk were contributing factors.
- The university had ample information about Natasha's mental health, yet failed to translate this into concrete action.

Why It Matters in a Scottish Context:

- The Equality Act 2010 is UK-wide legislation and applies fully in Scotland.
- The case underscores the need for specialist-led services that are capable of:
 - Recognising legal duties.
 - Implementing adjustments.
 - Escalating concerns.
 - Coordinating with NHS and external agencies.
- It reinforces the requirement for documented procedures, early intervention, and shared responsibility across services and academic teams.

This case has directly influenced guidance from:

- Universities UK
- Equality and Human Rights Commission
- Scottish Government and Universities Scotland on mental health strategy and inclusion.

2. Student Funding

The University of Dundee's Student Funding service offers advice and support to students seeking financial assistance during their studies. They provide guidance on scholarships, bursaries, discretionary funds, and budgeting resources to help manage living costs.

Core Activities

- Distributing hardship, discretionary, and digital inclusion funds.
- Providing targeted support for estranged students, care-experienced learners, and carers.
- Offering budgeting advice, emergency aid, and liaison with housing and local authorities.
- Advising international students on visa-compliant financial planning and access to charitable or university support including scholarships and bursaries.

Legislative and Policy Alignment

- Commission on Widening Access Final Report (2016) – tackles the poverty-related attainment gap.
- Scottish Funding Council Outcome Agreements – focus on access and retention for under-represented groups.
- Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021 - free period product provision and related menstrual health education.

Value to the Institution

- Retains students who may otherwise withdraw due to financial hardship.
- Reduces stress and inequality linked to the cost of living.
- Demonstrates public benefit and contributes to retention.
- Strengthens the university's commitment to social justice and widening participation.
- Reduces pressure on academic and disciplinary processes (related to debt or non-engagement).

3. Counselling

The University of Dundee's Counselling Service offers free, confidential support to students and staff, providing a safe space to discuss personal concerns with professional counsellors.

- **Assessment and Counselling** – Provide short-term, evidence-based counselling and psychological assessment to support students experiencing emotional or mental health difficulties.
- **Crisis and Risk Management** – Respond to students in acute distress, assess suicide risk, create safety plans, and liaise with NHS or emergency services when needed.
- **Referral and Liaison** – Coordinate with wellbeing, and disability services to ensure joined-up care and make referrals for specialist or longer-term support.
- **Preventative and Educational Work** – Deliver wellbeing workshops, psychoeducation, and awareness campaigns to promote resilience and positive mental health.
- **Professional and Ethical Practice** – Work within BACP/UKCP ethical frameworks, maintain clinical supervision, and contribute to institutional wellbeing data and governance.
- **Training and Capacity Building** – Equip staff and students with the skills to recognise and respond to mental distress through targeted training and resources.

Legislative and Policy Alignment

- **Scottish Government Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2023)** - Emphasises early intervention, trauma-informed support, prevention, and integrated services.
- **Universities Scotland/NUS Scotland Student Mental Health Agreement (2020, updated annually)** - Encourages a whole-institution approach, shared accountability, and collaborative action plans to enhance student mental health provision.
- **Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Outcome Agreements** - Require institutions to report on how they support student mental health, access, and retention, reinforcing accountability for inclusion and wellbeing.
- **Suicide Prevention Strategy for Scotland (Every Life Matters)**- Highlights the role of education providers in suicide prevention, risk identification, and referral to appropriate care.
- **Commission on Widening Access (Scotland) – Blueprint for Fairness (2016)** Recognises mental health as a barrier to access and success in higher education, reinforcing the need for tailored support for disadvantaged groups.
- **Safeguarding Legislation** - Including Adult Support and Protection, Forced Marriage, Female Genital Mutilation, Modern Slavery Acts, and Prevent Duty. Student Support leads the university's safeguarding function.

Value to the Institution

- Reduces mental health crises through early intervention and timely support.
- Increases institutional capacity to assess and manage risk.
- Enhances student safety, staff confidence, and engagement with learning.
- Contributes to student retention and academic progression through improved wellbeing.
- Demonstrates the university's duty of care and compliance with sector guidance.
- Supports a positive institutional reputation in student experience surveys and external audits.
- Fosters a culture of openness around mental health, reducing stigma and encouraging health positive behaviour.

4. Health Service

The University's **Health Service** provides a range of health-related advice and services for staff and students, including guidance on registering with local doctors and dentists, and access to mental health support.

Core Activities:

- Provide timely, specialist mental health assessment and needs-led interventions for students and staff.
- Bridge university and NHS systems, ensuring individuals access the right service at the right time with minimal barriers.
- Liaise directly with GPs and statutory health services through registered nursing status and honorary NHS contracts.
- Support crisis response through established referral pathways to NHS Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment Teams.
- Deliver mental health training to staff, building capacity and understanding across the university community.
- Manage and support individuals during gaps in statutory provision, particularly those experiencing acute distress or suicidal ideation.

Legislative and Policy Alignment

- Scottish Government Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2023) - Emphasises early intervention, trauma-informed support, prevention, and integrated services.

- Universities Scotland/NUS Scotland Student Mental Health Agreement (2020, updated annually) - Encourages a whole-institution approach, shared accountability, and collaborative action plans to enhance student mental health provision.
- Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Outcome Agreements - Require institutions to report on how they support student mental health, access, and retention, reinforcing accountability for inclusion and wellbeing.
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- Safeguarding Legislation - Including Adult Support and Protection, Forced Marriage, Female Genital Mutilation, Modern Slavery Acts, and Prevent Duty. Student Support leads the university's safeguarding function.

Value to the Institution

- Safeguards student and staff wellbeing, reducing escalation and crisis intervention demand.
- Strengthens the university's duty of care and legal compliance under the Equality Act 2010 and mental health frameworks.
- Enhances retention and academic success by providing early, specialist mental health support.
- Builds institutional resilience and mental health literacy through targeted staff development.
- Promotes the University of Dundee's reputation as a compassionate, inclusive institution with a proactive approach to mental health.

5. Student Support Services

Student Support at the University of Dundee encompasses proactive, preventative and transitional support for all students. The service includes Wellbeing, International Advice, and Specialist Support for Student Carers, among others.

Core Activities

- Wellbeing support and signposting.
- Coordinating peer support, Nightline, and healthy lifestyle initiatives.

- Transitional support (e.g., new students, returners from leave, accommodation and financial insecurity).
- Training staff and student leaders in mental health, consent, GBV, suicide prevention, and wellbeing promotion.
- Referrals to local health services, community organisations, food banks, and social prescribing.
- Supporting students in complex circumstances, including those at risk of disengagement or leaving the university.
- International Student Advice and Support, including:
 - Visa and immigration guidance in line with UKVI requirements.
 - Cultural and academic transition support for international students.
 - Liaison with academic schools, compliance officers, and wellbeing staff.
 - Advice on accommodation, finance, and community integration.

Legislative and Policy Alignment

- Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) – supports a holistic approach to wellbeing for all students under 25.
- Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 - development and delivery of the university's Corporate Parenting Plan.
- The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 – requires HEIs to identify, support, and plan for student carers.
- Public Health Scotland's Strategic Plan 2022–2025 – emphasises population wellbeing, prevention, and joined-up systems.
- UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) Compliance – requires universities to support international students' progression and visa conditions.
- Human Rights Act 1998 and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (incorporated into Scots law) – affirm the right to accessible education and wellbeing support for all students.
- Universities UK & Office for Students guidance on supporting students with mental health needs.
- Safeguarding Legislation - Including Adult Support and Protection, Forced Marriage, Female Genital Mutilation, Modern Slavery Acts, and Prevent Duty. Student Support leads the university's safeguarding function.

Value to the Institution

- Builds emotional resilience and academic stamina across the student body.

- Ensures regulatory compliance (e.g. UKVI sponsor licence, safeguarding responsibilities).
- Reduces long-term strain on counselling, crisis, and academic services.
- Enhances retention and progression, particularly for international and underrepresented students.
- Demonstrates a values-led, student-centred institutional culture to prospective applicants and external stakeholders.
- Increases institutional visibility in civic wellbeing, public health, and international education outcomes.

6. English for International Students

The University offers academic English support to international students, running a range of language modules and programmes throughout the academic year to help students get the most out of their studies.

Core Activities:

- Pre-sessional and in-sessional English language programmes
- Academic writing and communication support
- Embedded teaching in academic modules
- Cultural and academic integration workshops
- One-to-one tutorials

Legislative and Policy Alignment

· The Equality Act 2010 mandates that institutions must not discriminate based on nationality or ethnicity and should provide necessary support to ensure all students have equal access to education.

· UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) Compliance - Universities must comply with UK Home Office requirements as licensed Student Visa sponsors. Sponsorship duties

Value to the Institution

- Supports academic attainment and progression for both international and home students.
- Supports compliance with UKVI and immigration requirements by ensuring academic readiness and progression.
- Increases international student satisfaction, impacting league table positions and TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework) metrics.

- Contributes to institutional income through sustainable international recruitment and retention.
- Fosters intercultural communication and inclusion, enhancing the global learning environment.
- Reduces academic misconduct by equipping students with essential academic writing and referencing skills.
- Builds institutional reputation for high-quality international student support, aiding global partnerships and alumni relations.

Restructuring these services risks detriment to academic outcomes and student satisfaction, potentially affecting international recruitment and retention. Specialist staff understand the pedagogical and linguistic needs of international students in higher education and should not be replaced by generic academic services.

7. Careers Services

The University of Dundee's Careers Service offers future-focused support to help students from all backgrounds plan and achieve successful transitions into graduate employment, further study, or self-employment. The service works closely with academic schools, employers and professional bodies to ensure students are career-ready in an evolving global job market.

Core activities:

- Individualised careers guidance and coaching
- CV, application, and interview preparation
- Inclusive careers workshops and employer events
- Work-based learning, placements, and internship programmes
- Specialist employability support for disabled students, international students, and care-experienced learners
- Support for entrepreneurial skills and start-up pathways

Legislative and Policy Alignment

- Under the Equality Act 2010, universities are required to provide equitable access to employability support, ensuring that students with protected characteristics are not disadvantaged in preparing for or entering the workforce.
- Scottish Government's Young Person's Guarantee aims to connect every 16 to 24-year-old in Scotland to an opportunity such as a job, apprenticeship, further or higher education, training programme, or volunteering. The full document is available here: [Scottish Government](#)

- Scotland's Future Skills Action Plan outlines Scotland's strategic approach to developing a skilled workforce equipped for the future. The full document is available here: [Scottish Government](#)
- Commission on Widening Access was established to advise on achieving equal access to higher education in Scotland. Their final report, "A Blueprint for Fairness," presents a comprehensive plan and can be accessed here: The full document is available here: [Scottish Government](#)

Value to the Institution

- Drives graduate success metrics used in league tables and HESA Graduate Outcomes data.
- Supports widening access and social mobility by providing targeted employability support to underrepresented groups.
- Enhances student engagement, wellbeing, and retention by linking studies with meaningful future pathways.
- Fulfils responsibilities under the Young Person's Guarantee and Scotland's Future Skills Action Plan to prepare graduates for future employment.
- Builds employer partnerships that support work placements, graduate recruitment, and curriculum co-design.
- Strengthens alumni and donor relations through visible graduate success stories.
- Demonstrates public value and return on investment in higher education, aligning with national economic and social priorities.

Reducing or generalising Careers Service provision risks disproportionately impacting students who already face barriers to employment, including disabled, international, and care-experienced students. Without specialist support:

- Graduate outcomes may decline, affecting institutional rankings and student satisfaction (e.g. Graduate Outcomes Survey).
- Widening participation efforts may falter, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who benefit most from personalised guidance.
- Students may lack access to inclusive employer networks, adaptive job search strategies, and awareness of their rights and reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

V. Impact of Resizing or Reshaping Essential Student Services

1. Impact on Students

- **Delays in Support and Assessment**
Restructuring or reducing services leads to bottlenecks in accessing disability support, wellbeing checks, counselling, and hardship funding. This is particularly harmful for students in crisis, international students unfamiliar with UK systems, and care-experienced students navigating multiple services.
- **Worsening Mental Health and Inequality**
Without timely intervention, students with anxiety, depression, trauma, or neurodivergence will be impacted academically and personally. Those from underrepresented or disadvantaged groups are disproportionately affected, undermining widening access and inclusion targets.
- **Increased Risk of Disengagement and Drop-out**
Students unable to access personalised or sustained support are at greater risk of leaving university, which negatively impacts institutional retention rates and learner outcomes.

2. Impact on University Staff

- **Increased Pressure on Academic and Professional Staff**
Lecturers, personal tutors, and front-line administrators, whilst experts in their fields, are not specialist student services professionals. Expecting them to pick up unmet student needs creates inappropriate risk. For instance, expecting lecturers to schedule additional tutorials to meet students' language and academic literacy needs impacts their workload and ability to deliver all the necessary content for modules.
- **Staff Burnout and Reputational Strain**
Morally distressing situations, such as supporting suicidal students or managing complaints when services fail, can contribute to staff burnout, stress-related absences, and reputational fallout across schools and departments.

3. Impact on Local and External Services

- **Overburdening of Local NHS and Community Services**
Universities are increasingly relied on to provide first-line mental health and wellbeing support. Restructuring or reducing university services pushes more students into already **overstretched and underfunded local NHS provision**, including GP surgeries, community mental health teams, A&E, third sector provision (e.g. Hope Point) and CAMHS transitions.
- **Disruption to Multi-Agency Coordination**
Dedicated university staff play critical liaison roles with SAAS, DSA providers, NHS services, social workers, and GPs. Reducing internal capacity compromises continuity of care and slows down joint working at a time when

joined-up care has been strongly recommended in light of cases such as **Natasha Abrahart**.

- **Undermining Regional and National Goals**

Universities are vital partners in delivering the Scottish Government's Mental Health Strategy, Widening Access Framework, and Care-Experienced Bursary programme. Weakening internal services reduces alignment with these strategic commitments and places greater strain on local authorities and the third sector.

4. Strategic and Legal Consequences

- **Breach of Legal Obligations**

Universities have legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010, the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, and Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003. Reductions in support may result in failure to make reasonable adjustments, discriminatory provision, or breakdowns in safeguarding and care pathways.

- **Reputational and Financial Risk**

Cases like that of Natasha Abrahart demonstrate the legal, moral and financial consequences of failing to provide coordinated and specialist support for students with mental health conditions or disabilities.

- **Loss of Trust and Recruitment Challenges**

Families, schools, local authorities, and international agents increasingly expect robust support systems. Reductions can impact recruitment, particularly for care-experienced and disabled students, and international students seeking inclusive learning environments.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

Student Services at the University of Dundee exemplify the institution's commitment to Scotland's national priorities on equality, mental health, and inclusive education. These highly specialist services are integral to upholding legal duties and delivering meaningful support across the student lifecycle. Their complexity and effectiveness cannot be replicated through generic or downsized provision. Service cuts have already been applied with impacts being felt across the University.

Strategic Risks of Restructuring or Resizing

1. Student-Level Impacts:

- Loss of support for disabled or at-risk students, increasing non-continuation.
- Reduced mental health resilience and safety concerns.
- Disengagement from marginalised groups (e.g. care-experienced, refugees, estranged).

2. Staff Impacts:

- Increased pastoral workload on academic staff with no specialist training.
- Loss of institutional memory and safeguarding intelligence.

3. Local and NHS Impact:

- Overstretched local health, CAMHS, and social care services bear the burden.
- Breakdowns in joined-up support undermine public-sector collaboration.

4. Institutional Risks:

- Breach of Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty.
- Damage to university reputation and compliance with SFC outcomes.
- Failure to meet inclusion, retention, and graduate outcome targets.

Recommendations:

1. Protect specialist-led services.
2. Conduct thorough Equality Impact Assessments before service redesign.
3. Centre student voice and lived experience in planning and evaluation.
4. Note the legal obligations of service areas and the impact cuts would have on this.

5. Embed Student Services as a core strategy for medium to long term recovery.

VII. Case Study: Student H – A Ukrainian Student Building a Future in Scotland

Background

Student H, a 19-year-old student originally from Ukraine, has lived in Scotland for over three years with her extended family and holds settled status under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. She enrolls in a Biological Sciences degree and is eligible for support through SAAS, including Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), having established ordinary residence.

Student H has a long-term autoimmune condition that causes fatigue and cognitive issues. She also lives with trauma-related anxiety and low mood as a result of her experiences during the war. English is her second language.

Phase 1: Transition In – Pre-Arrival and First Year

- **Disability Services**

Student H registers with the disability service during enrolment. A specialist adviser works with her to:

- Interpret her translated medical evidence
- Arrange a specialist study needs assessment (funded by SAAS DSA)
- Prepare a Personal Egress and Evacuation Plan and disseminate to relevant teams.
- Develop a detailed Individual Support Plan outlining reasonable adjustments to teaching and learning
- Submit DSA applications for ergonomic equipment, specialist one-to-one support, and assistive technology and provide support through the process
- Coordinate with SAAS, her GP, and a mental health nurse for supporting documentation
- Link in with the academic school to ensure adjustments are put in place.
- Liaise with other professional services

- **English for International Students**

Although fluent, Student H experiences anxiety with academic writing. She attends in-session language workshops on scientific writing and receives ongoing one-to-one support to boost her confidence and academic integration.

- **Counselling and Mental Health Services**

The mental health service carries out an initial wellbeing assessment. Student H is offered short-term counselling focused on trauma and anxiety. Risk is monitored throughout, and collaborative communication with her GP ensures continuity of care.

- **Student Support Services**

Student H joins a transition support programme for students from refugee and displaced backgrounds. She is paired with a peer mentor and attends sessions on managing life in a Scottish University. Wellbeing staff help her register with university and local community activities.

- **Student Funding**

Staff help Student H apply for SAAS tuition and living cost support. She also receives discretionary funding to cover start-up costs (e.g. clothing, textbooks). The team liaise with SAAS to resolve delays and clarify her entitlements under the eligibility rules.

- **Careers Services**

During welcome week, Student H attends a careers induction session. She completes an early career profiling assessment and books a 1:1 meeting with a careers adviser who explores her long-term goals in life sciences. She begins building a CV and portfolio from Year 1.

Phase 2: Through University – Progression, Health Management and Planning

In her second year, Student H begins to experience more regular flare-ups of her condition, affecting her attendance and concentration.

- **Disability Services** update her support plan and DSA-funded support. They liaise with academic departments about flexible attendance and alternative assessment arrangements and ensure DSA-funded providers deliver weekly check-ins and study mentoring.
- **Counselling and Health Services** offer further support when Student H experiences low mood and increased anxiety due to a family illness back in Ukraine. Her mental health adviser coordinates with her GP and NHS psychological services to ensure safe, joined-up care.
- **English for International Students** continues through one-to-one tutorials, helping Student H complete a research proposal and dissertation planning.
- **Student Funding** help her apply for funding support as her circumstances change. They ensure her support remains uninterrupted.
- **Student Support** maintain regular drop-in points. She participates in peer-led wellbeing groups and volunteers as a mentor for other displaced students.
- **Careers Services** support her in applying for a competitive summer research placement. She receives individual advice on interviews, disclosure of her health condition, and adjustment requests.

Phase 3: Transition Out – Graduation and Career Readiness

- **Careers Services** provide intensive final-year support:
 - Updating CVs and LinkedIn profiles
 - Targeting employers with inclusive practices
 - Offering mock interviews and employer introductions
 - Advising on graduate visa options and Scottish job market entry
 - Supporting applications for PhD funding with tailored personal statement advice
- **Disability Services** contribute to a transition plan for employment. They help Student H draft a statement of support needs for future employers and advise her on Access to Work.
- **Student Support and Mental Health Teams** offer wraparound support during graduation anxiety and transition planning, ensuring Student H leaves university with confidence and clarity.
- **Both Teams help Student H leave well.**

Strategic Reflections

- **Joined-Up Specialist Support:** Student H's progress depended on tightly coordinated, professional services that shared information (with her consent), respected her identity, and responded flexibly to change.
- **Equity and Legal Compliance:** Her case reflects universities' legal duty to anticipate and meet the needs of students under the Equality Act 2010, the Human Rights Act 1998, and national widening access and mental health strategies.
- **Career Success Through Early Engagement:** The careers service work from Year 1 onwards enabled Student H to build skills, experience, and networks aligned with her long-term ambitions — an outcome impossible with generic or reactive provision.

VIII. Summary of Key Legislation

Scotland's widening access agenda and the Scottish Government's commitment to equitable education are underpinned by the following key frameworks:

1. Equality Act 2010 - UK legislation that consolidates anti-discrimination laws, requiring higher education institutions to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students and prevent discrimination. [Equality Act 2010 – Legislation.gov.uk](#)
2. Human Rights Act 1998 (incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights) -
All UK public bodies, including universities, must uphold the rights in the Human Rights Act, including the right to education (Article 2, Protocol 1), freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 3), and respect for private and family life (Article 8). Student services contribute to realising these rights, particularly for disabled, care-experienced, and international students. Human Rights Act 1998 – [Legislation.gov.uk](#)
3. British Sign Language (BSL) (Scotland) Act 2015
The Disability Team is a key stakeholder in developing and implementing the university's BSL Plan. [British Sign Language \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#)
4. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) - Though not domestic law, the UK is a signatory to this convention, and Scottish public sector services are expected to align with its principles. It reinforces inclusive education (Article 24), accessibility (Article 9), and respect for dignity, autonomy, and choice. [UNCRPD – UN Treaty Text](#)
5. Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations (PSBAR 2018) - require universities to make their websites and digital content accessible to all, particularly disabled users. This ensures compliance with legal duties and supports inclusive access to education and services.
6. UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) Compliance - Universities must comply with UK Home Office requirements as licensed Student Visa sponsors. [Sponsorship duties](#)
7. Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Outcome Agreements - Agreements outlining the activities that colleges and universities plan to deliver in return for funding, focusing on areas such as widening access, quality, and accountability. [Outcome Agreements – Scottish Funding Council](#)
8. Universities and Scotland: Time to Choose The need to invest strategically in Scotland's universities
9. Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy: Delivery Plan 2023-2025 - A Scottish Government plan detailing actions to improve mental health and wellbeing across Scotland, including in educational settings. [Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy: Delivery Plan 2023-2025 – Scottish Government](#)
10. A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Delivery Plan-The Scottish Government's plan outlining ambitions and actions to improve the lives of disabled people,

ensuring their rights are realized.

[A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Delivery Plan – Scottish Government](#)

11. The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016-Legislation that makes provision about carers, including the identification of carers' needs for support through adult carer support plans and young carer statements. [Carers \(Scotland\) Act 2016 – Legislation.gov.uk](#)
12. Scotland's Public Sector Equality Duty - A duty requiring public authorities in Scotland to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations.
[Public Sector Equality Duty: Specific Duties in Scotland – Equality and Human Rights Commission](#)
13. Universities Scotland/NUS Scotland Student Mental Health Agreement - An initiative encouraging partnerships between universities and students' associations to improve student mental health and wellbeing.
[Student Mental Health Agreement Project – Think Positive](#)
14. The Suicide Prevention Strategy (2022–2032) A 10-year national strategy that explicitly includes universities and colleges in creating compassionate, stigma-free environments. Highlights the importance of training staff, recognising warning signs, and intervening early. [Creating Hope Together: suicide prevention strategy 2022 to 2032 - gov.scot](#)