

# Collaborative Code in relation to Community Issues

De Montfort University and the University of Leicester are working in collaboration (along with other key stakeholders<sup>1</sup>) to develop a shared understanding and approach to issues which relate to students who reside in local community. This Collaborative Code has been produced which applies to students of both institutions.

## 1. Context

The expansion of higher education has resulted in increasing numbers of students from a wide variety of backgrounds and nationalities coming to Leicester to study. The outcome has been visible in growing concentrations of students in specific residential areas located close to the two universities<sup>2</sup>. Although these areas remain mixed, containing both students and established residents, concerns have been raised in relation to the impact of students on these neighbourhoods.

The presence of students has a predominantly positive impact upon the city. Students contribute to local economy through their purchasing power, they also add to existing cultural diversity within the city. Student accommodation can help in regenerating areas that might otherwise have declined<sup>3</sup>; accommodation accreditation schemes serve to improve the quality of housing in student areas. The presence of students contributes to the development of transport infrastructure (bus routes and cycle paths). Students also provide custom for some small shops. Moreover, graduates who continue to live and work in Leicester after completion

of their studies contribute to improving the region's skills levels thus encouraging businesses to locate in Leicester, and thereby raising the City's economic profile. However, it is acknowledged that the presence of transient students with no long-term interests in an area can detrimentally alter the characteristics of a neighbourhood. Examples include occasional noise and antisocial behaviour, higher insurance premiums, and a perception of higher crime figures, litter and a 'run-down' environment. Large concentrations of students can lead to resentment and friction; tensions can deter the development of cohesion and ultimately lead to a divided community.

Both institutions acknowledge their responsibility in promoting a safe and tolerant local community in which students and established residents live harmoniously; they are actively working in partnership with local residents and agencies towards this goal. Tangible evidence of this intent can be demonstrated at DMU where a Community Development Officer has been appointed, and at the University of Leicester where a part-time Community Warden position has been developed. Also at the University of Leicester a 'Responding to the Challenges of

Studentification' document demonstrating work in the local community is under constant review. Both institutions hold regular Community Liaison meetings chaired by senior management and attended by community representatives<sup>4</sup>, and both are represented on the Board of the Safer Leicester Partnership. Substantial numbers of students from both institutions are also actively involved in volunteering, particularly with community projects<sup>5</sup>.

There is increasing national interest in this issue. Academic work includes: Universities UK 'Studentification: a guide to opportunities, challenges and practice' (2006); National Union of Students 'Neighbourhood: Planning and Partnerships' (2009); NUS / Universities UK Living Together, Working Together (2010). These publications illustrate how institutions and Students' Unions can engage with key stakeholders in the community and encourage partnership working. National training such as the 'Community Initiatives Seminar' (Unipol – June 2009) have begun to address these issues. Moreover, growing political interest involves the potential for changes to planning legislation in relation to student areas.

## 2. Expectations of Behaviour

'In a social context, the University expects students to:

1. Remember that their behaviour outside the University reflects on the institution and on the reputation of all its students and to act accordingly;
2. Treat fellow members of the University and members of the general public with courtesy at all times;
3. Be sensitive to the right to a peaceful existence of those living in and adjacent to student residences (both University-owned and in the private sector);
4. Refrain, in particular, from noisy or uncontrolled behaviour at night or in any circumstances where this would cause offence to neighbours or, in University residences, would prevent other students working or revising;
5. Respect the cultural diversity of the University and the local community;
6. Maintain University property and premises in good order;
7. Refrain from causing damage to public or private property;
8. Be aware of environmental issues by disposing of litter and waste responsibly and minimising use of paper and other consumables.'

*Taken from: University of Leicester Student Charter/Student Code of Social Responsibility and De Montfort University General Regulations.*

## 3. Features of Collaborative Code

- Strategic partnership working at a senior level, demonstrating a joint positive commitment to this agenda;
- shared expectations of student behaviour within the community;
- consistent approach to community cohesion that seeks to break-down the barriers between groups

and builds bridges between students and the wider community recognising the benefits of joint programmes and promoting work at a grass roots level that aids the local community;

- shared information and best practice that aids the development of community relations;
- exploration of initiatives and opportunities bringing together appropriate stakeholders from within both institutions and the local community to openly discuss issues and work towards solutions;
- partnership working including joint consultation with community groups and organisations;
- collaboration with other partners (e.g. the Safer Leicester Partnership) in developing safe and tolerant local communities, with particular focus on those communities in which substantial numbers of students reside;
- publicising of good work that is carried out by students in the local area.

## 4. Benefits of Collaborative Code

- Working with existing forums to promote open discussion of community issues can take place (including students, the local Council, Police, tenants associations, elected representatives);
- provision of information for students living in the community, which ensures that they are aware of their rights and responsibilities as tenants, and reinforces responsibilities;
- ensures that good relations between people of different beliefs on and off campus are developed and strengthened;
- encourages students to talk to their community neighbours and tackle issues of common concern;
- in collaboration with the respective Students' Unions encourages student involvement, through representation on community

groups (Area Committees, Joint Action Groups etc), voting and involvement in local elections, voluntary activities (Contact, Student Community Action), etc.

## 5. Evaluation

The University of Leicester and De Montfort University will collaborate in seeking feedback on the Collaborative Code from:

- Local residents through community / residents' groups (Joint Action Group, Area Meetings etc);
- Police and Environmental Health Department of Leicester City Council
- Students

## 6. Conclusion

Both institutions have already undertaken a significant amount of work together with their respective Student Unions, Police, Local Authority and immediate communities and this will continue in the future.

Students in Leicester often live together regardless of the institution they are attending; issues faced by students and permanent residents will be similar for both universities. Sharing ideas and collaborating over actions will enable us to reach out to all Leicester communities and provide a cohesive support service for our students.

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<sup>1</sup> Both DMU and UoL have close working relationships with their Students Union, Local Police and City Council Agencies.

<sup>2</sup> Clarendon Park, West Knighton, Highfields, Evington, Westcotes, and Narborough Road are the areas most affected.

<sup>3</sup> For example Unite housing at Filbert Village, Opal Court on Lancaster Road, and the proposed Granby Halls development.

<sup>4</sup> Local residents, Police, Environmental Health, elected Councillors, students.

<sup>5</sup> Contact at the University of Leicester and De Montfort Students' Union Volunteering has had this year 2,100 student members involved in community projects including Right to Read in Schools, Scamp with Disabled children, Saffron Meadows allotments scheme, Coping with Cancer, Fuse Mentoring Project, Domestic Violence Integrated Response Project and University Hospitals Leicester.