

**Venue in Edinburgh between March 20<sup>th</sup> and March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
or  
About SPARQS excellence in everything they did**

Three events have been conducted by SPARQS (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland) between March 20<sup>th</sup> and March 24<sup>th</sup>:

1. on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of March: ESPAQ – 4<sup>th</sup> Management Meeting;
2. on 22<sup>nd</sup> of March: International Delegates' Day
3. on 23<sup>rd</sup> of March: SPARQS Conference 2017

**Day 3**

**International Delegates' Day  
Stirling**

It is hard to say what was mostly impressive on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March: to visit the University of Stirling and meet the representatives of the Students' Union, the Castle, the Stirling Bridge, or ... the wind? However we covered the 60 km from Edinburgh to Stirling in a cosy coach, led by a brilliant tour guide who gave us many details about the local history. And so, we forgot about the pitiless chill and unrelenting wind...!



Stirling is visually and historically dominated by the Stirling Castle, one of the main symbols of Scotland's



independence. Major battles took place in the nearby, such as at the Stirling Bridge in 1297, and at Bannockburn in 1314. The names of William Wallace and Robert de Bruce have been enshrined ever after as central figures of Scots' history. During the reign of James II (1437-1460) Stirling was considered to be one of the capitals of Scotland (as the king held 9 Parliaments there, as against 6 in Perth and 13 in Edinburgh).



We arrived at the University of Stirling before 11.00 AM leaving the warm coach and starting to experience the winds of Stirling!

The day was attended by over 30 delegates from a variety of countries, including the USA, Portugal, Ireland, Belgium, Norway, Japan, Australia and



Nee Zealand, and of course, over „a dozen“ delegates from Armenia, Italy, Spain and Romania partners within the ESPAQ project in which SPARQS is an important contributing partner.

After a warm welcome, Eve Lewis head of SPARQS introduced the international delegates, describing the SPARQS' work form training to consultancy, supporting and empowering students to influence their learning and campus experiences showing their activities in Scotland and internationally.

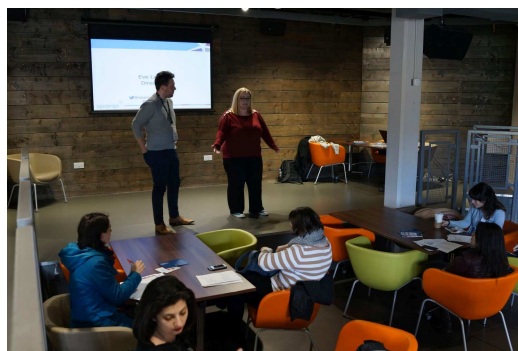
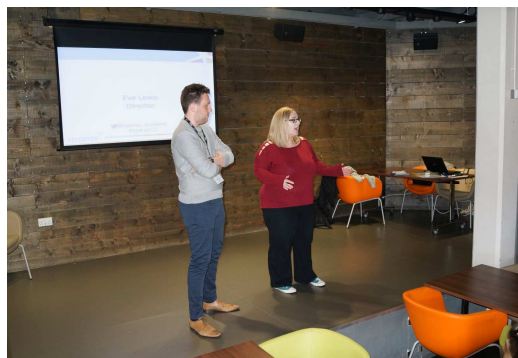


Then it was the turn of Steff Black (newly appointed to the sparqs team) and Matt Adie to present the University of Stirling and the activity of the Students' Union.

The University of Stirling opened in 1967 on a green field site outside the town. It is the first new university to be established in Scotland for nearly 400 years (since 1582). Nowadays there are enrolled over 12000 students (9200+ undergraduate students and 3400+ postgraduate students). The staff number exceeds 1400 persons. The "internationalization degree" at Stirling University is also high. About 23% of the students come from overseas representing 120 countries, respectively.

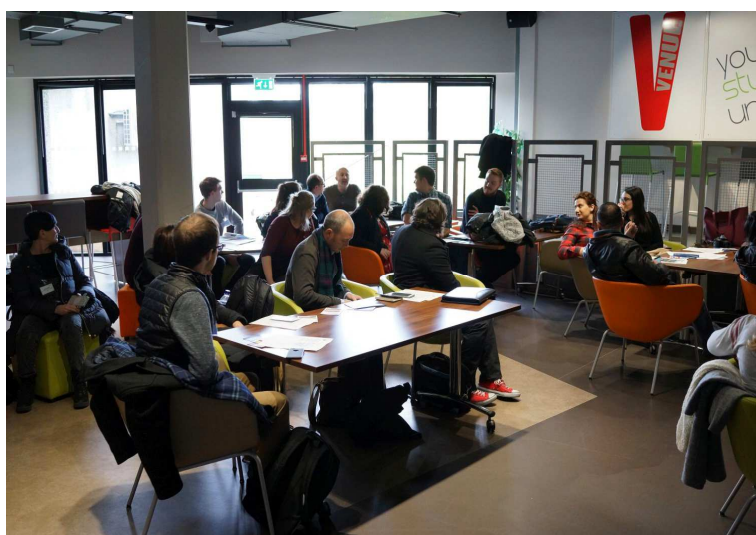
Delegates took much away in terms of how students are engaged in quality at the university. Stef and Matt introduced the delegates to some practical examples of student engagement in quality at the university and how they work in partnership with staff on a variety of course, university and national level activities.  
<http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/culture.php?page=564>.

Matt spoke about the different level of students' representation and increased reach in training. They also showed a challenging video made to promote the course rep role <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKekrqsakr4>. Another „promotional" video pointed at „The Rate Teaching Awards" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUzYI3GTVug>.



From the very beginning Eve and Simon Varwell, another great soul of the day, distributed folders, folds, prospectus, and leaflets about SPARQS, the Scottish Universities and Higher Education, as well as the Scottish Colleges and Further Education.

All the received papers aroused a vivid interest and debates...





The morning meeting rounded off with a tour of the University Campus guided by Stef and Matt.

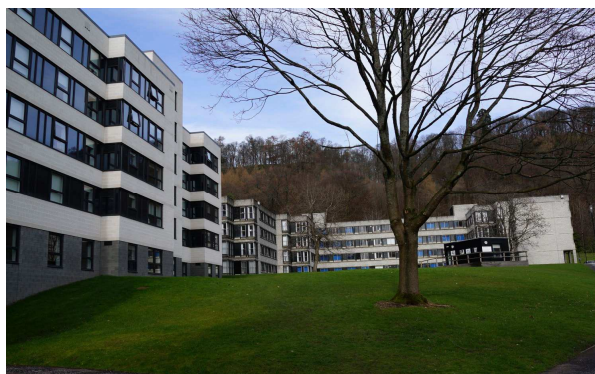
The tour of the Campus was breathtaking! First, it was the beauty of the surroundings that left us speechless. Second, again, it was literally the wind! We did our best to brave, to show that it was not that serious... But the contrast between our Eskimos look and Matt's „at full sails” walk and nonchalance was striking!



Set in the shadow of the Ochil Hills, the University is located just two miles (3.2 km) from the centre of Stirling.



The university campus is approximately 330 acres (1.3 km<sup>2</sup>) in size, incorporating the Stirling University Innovation Park and the Dementia Centre. It is situated on the site of the historic Airthrey estate which includes Airthrey Castle, the Hermitage woods, Airthrey Loch, Airthrey Golf Course and a 50-metre swimming pool. As late as August 2016, the University was reorganized into four faculties, the Stirling Management School and the Stirling Graduate School.



It is undoubtedly one of the most attractive campuses in Europe and in the world! And small wonder, the University was ranked 1st in the UK for its campus environment in the International Student Barometer 2016. So, at the end of our tour, we could paraphrase: „Vedi Napoli e poi ... the Stirling University Campus”!

The last testing followed: the visit at the Castle of Stirling... with its specific winds, too!



Led by a fascinating guide, we trod into the miracle of more than nine centuries of history. The detailed explanation strewn with picturesque stories revived the legendary figures of the Kings of the House of Stewart (or today Stuart, and in Gaelic, Stiùbhart)



Before the union with England, Stirling Castle was also one of the most used of the many Scottish royal residences, very much a palace as well as a fortress.



Several Scottish Kings and Queens have been crowned at Stirling, including Mary, Queen of Scots, in 1542, and others were born or died there. There have been at least eight sieges of Stirling Castle, including several during the Wars of Scottish Independence, with the last being in 1746, when Bonnie Prince Charlie (Charles „III“) unsuccessfully tried to take the castle.

Stirling Castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and is now a tourist attraction managed by Historic Scotland.