

University of Manchester

Policy on Personalised Learning: Core Principles underpinning the Manchester Experience.

Introduction

1. The University of Manchester is well-placed to deliver personalised learning across the student experience but needs to strike a balance between curriculum choice and excellent small group teaching. Excellent advising from academic staff, expert support staff and peers should be a normal and expected part of the student experience.
2. This document defines a set of principles that form the basis of the University's approach to personalised learning. The ethos is to promote a culture in which respect for learners is paramount and where students are actively encouraged to develop constructive academic relationships with individual teachers, together with a sense of identity within a cohort of learners.
3. Students will be further encouraged to take ownership of their learning-experience and to develop the constellation of skills associated with a Manchester Graduate as defined in the *Purposes of a Manchester Education*. The combined effect is intended to stimulate a learning culture that enables students to achieve their full potential and whose graduates will be highly competitive in the knowledge economy.

Principles

1. Student Choice:

- i. All students should be afforded opportunities to choose optional units in order to pursue their individual academic interests whilst maintaining the fundamental objectives of their degree as recognised by the *Purposes of a Manchester Education* and, where appropriate, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.
- ii. All students should have access to suitable technologies and educational resources that allow flexible delivery of appropriate components of the curriculum at a time and a place of their choosing.
- iii. Programmes should be designed to offer a range of pedagogical styles across the student academic experience.

2. Scale and Support:

- i. All students should have the opportunity for significant interaction with teachers on an individual or small group basis.
- ii. All students will have an *Academic Advisor* whose role will include:
 - a. Providing information and guidance on academic choice
 - b. Assisting students with the planning of short-term and long-term targets for development
 - c. Proactively monitoring both academic performance and student engagement and advising on constructive strategies for improvement as necessary

- d. Helping students both to identify the skills being acquired and to recognise progress towards fulfilment of the *Purposes of a Manchester Education*
- e. Encouraging students to productively reflect on their academic development; for example, through the use of a *personal portfolio* or *personal development plan*
- f. Working with students to build personal academic relationships
- g. Making weekly contact with students using an appropriate combination of face-to-face meetings, e-mail, on-line communications, etc., in order to address one or more of the above (a-f) on a regular and developing basis
- h. Ensuring insofar as is possible that any student facing academic and/or personal difficulties does not lose contact with academic teachers or tutors or become isolated from student support staff and facilities

Academic Advisement must be a partnership in which

- it is the responsibility of the Advisor to be proactive in communicating with their students and to escalate such efforts as required
 - it is the responsibility of students to engage with their *Academic Advisor* in order to realise the intended benefits
- iii. All students should have access to some form of peer-support during their studies.

3. Interactivity and Self-expression

- i. All students should have opportunities to interact with staff and fellow students in a variety of learning contexts.
- ii. Students should be given ample opportunities to develop, articulate and defend their own arguments and opinions.

Guidance on the role of Academic Advisor

The implementation of Academic Advisors may vary according to specific local needs and so the following are intended to inform the development of specific implementation strategies that adhere to the principles of the Policy on Personalised Learning.

1. All students will be assigned an Academic Advisor at the beginning of their period of study.
2. Students are able to request a change of Academic Advisor at any time. Schools should clearly articulate the process within programme documentation, which should include an opportunity for the student to feedback on why they feel that a change of Academic Advisor is necessary.
3. A student would normally retain the same Academic Advisor throughout their studies but it should be recognised that some flexibility might be beneficial or indeed necessary. For example, there might be positive benefits to changing advisors as a student progresses through certain Programmes. However, in order to establish a meaningful relationship between advisor and advisee, it would seem appropriate that *Academic Advisors* would be assigned for a minimum of one academic year.

While it is envisaged that a student would normally have a single Academic Advisor at any given time, there might nonetheless be circumstances in which one or more of the roles of the Advisor might be devolved to suitably qualified staff. Any such devolution would require robust management policies to ensure that students were not disadvantaged.

4. Schools should consider having a senior member of staff acting as a 'Senior Academic Advisor' who would act as a point of reference to academic advisors in specific Programmes or Discipline Areas, would disseminate good practice, liaise with other academic advisors on implementation and policy, and would oversee any relevant quality assurance issues.
5. Some schools employ Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) to enhance the provision of small group teaching. These teachers represent a valuable resource that might contribute to the process of academic advisement.
6. The role of Academic Advisor should not be considered exclusive but might normally be expected to overlap with any of several existing roles; for example, where appropriate, an Academic Advisor might also act as an Academic Tutor for a given set of students.
7. Academic Advisors would be encouraged to make use of the communication tools available in the Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment.
 - For example, an appropriate group-space could be created that would allow an Academic Advisor to 'meet' with their students on-line, either synchronously (at predetermined 'surgeries') or asynchronously via a bulletin-board. The built-in communication tools readily permit confidential one-to-one dialogue or group-based discussions between all registered members of the group. This would be an excellent vehicle with which to make regular contact with students. It would offer the further advantage of automatically tracking student engagement with the contributions of

individual members being easily isolated and tracked by either time/date or content.

8. Faculty/School administration might be expected to support the role of Academic Advisor by providing relevant information in a timely fashion (e.g. attendance/performance monitoring).
9. The Academic Advisor system should be subject to annual monitoring (including input from student feedback) in order to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

Document control box	
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