

# School of Social Sciences (SoSS) guide to Academic Advising

## Part One

This guide is for academic staff working as Academic Advisors to SoSS undergraduate and post-graduate taught students.

Unless specifically arranged in agreement with your Head of Department, your academic advisees will be students in the School of Social Sciences, i.e. those registered on programmes administered by SoSS. You will be informed before the beginning of each academic year which programmes you are providing academic advising for.

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## Background information

The School of Social Sciences (SoSS) is one of four Schools in the Faculty of Humanities. It is home to around 5,000 undergraduate students, with many more students from around the University taking social science course units either as a programme requirement or as a free choice. The Faculty of Humanities itself has around 18,000 registered students, equivalent to a medium-sized UK university.

SoSS brings together eight distinct Departments:

- Criminology
- Economics
- Law
- Politics
- Philosophy
- Social Anthropology
- Sociology
- Social Statistics.

## Degrees offered by SoSS

The section below outlines the various undergraduate degrees offered by SoSS. The programme structure for the programmes you have been allocated students from can be found in the relevant programme handbook, which can be found on the Programme Hub on BlackBoard. It is important that you have knowledge of the programme(s) your students are studying, so that you understand what their academic work will entail and what some of their decisions will involve, we therefore ask you to familiarise yourself with the programme structure and handbook.

### I. Multidisciplinary degrees

- BA (Economic & Social Studies) – known colloquially as BA(Econ)

BA(Econ) is the School's largest degree programme. Students on the BA(Econ) programme take a general, broad-based first year, after which they can specialize or joint-specialize in some of the disciplines offered within the School, as well as in subjects offered by the Alliance Manchester Business School.

BA(Econ) students apply for and are registered on the Accounting, Finance (these two often as joint specializations), and Economics pathways. However, the degree is popular among students for its flexibility.

The School of Social Sciences cooperates closely with other Schools in the Faculty of Humanities, not least for BA(Econ), but also for any programme where students have free choice credits.

- BA in Politics, Philosophy & Economics (PPE)

All advertised units on the PPE schedules are provided by the Departments within SoSS. In the third year, PPE students may drop one discipline, must take the specialist unit 'SOCS30001 - Topics in PPE', and must complete a 20-credit dissertation in one of the three disciplines.

- BA Social Sciences (BASS)

The BASS degree comprises Sociology, Social Anthropology, Politics, Philosophy, Criminology, and Social Statistics. Students are accepted on to this degree to study a joint pathway. In the first year, all students must take SOAN10081,

Engaging with Social Research. From the second year onwards, students can choose whether to take a single or joint specialisation.

## II. Specialist programmes

The Departments offer specialist undergraduate programmes, which are administered by the respective Departments as follows:

Department	Specialist Programmes
Criminology	BA Criminology BA Criminology with International Study
Economics	BSc Economics
Law	LLB Bachelor of Laws LLB Bachelor of Law with International Study LLB Law with Criminology LLB Law with Criminology and International Study LLB Law with Politics LLB Bachelor of Law with Politics and International Study
Politics	BSocSc Politics and International Relations
Philosophy	BA Philosophy
Social Anthropology	BSocSc Social Anthropology
Sociology	BSocSc Sociology

## Programme Information

For more information, including Handbooks, Programme structures, Study Guides and Degree Regulations see the *Your Programme* page <https://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/student-intranet/undergraduate/your-programme/>

The screenshot displays the 'Politics' programme page on the student intranet. The page is titled 'Politics' and provides course information and guidelines. A navigation menu on the left lists various programmes, with 'Politics' currently selected. The main content area includes links to 'Handbooks', 'Programme details', 'Study guides', and 'Degree regulations'. There is also a 'Course unit selection' section with a 'Read more >>' link. A small image of a street scene at night is visible, with the caption 'Politics' and the text 'Find out more about Politics at Manchester'.

## Academic Advising role and rationale

### *Role and expectations*

- The academic advising role is best thought of as a *coaching* or *mentoring* role, where the aim is to support the advisee's academic development and progress throughout their time at university.
- Academic Advisors should work with students to build a relationship based on a discussion of how students should best pursue their academic development and progress.
- Academic Advisors should be available for students to book individual meetings other than the standard meetings outlined below. The means for booking these meetings needs to be made clear to an Advisor's students.
- Academic Advisors should give advice on general academic matters, typically including: the transition to independent learning in higher education; basic principles of choice of course units; plagiarism and academic malpractice; understanding feedback; undertaking course work; preparation for exams; employability; and time management. Depending on the aptitudes of the Academic Advisor (and the profile of their advisees), this list may differ slightly from case to case.
- Write work, study, or placement references on request.
- Refer students to other sources of help (see "Services, support and resources" page 7), and develop a working knowledge of what these sources are and what they can offer.
- Respond to advisee emails within the usual recommended timeframe, i.e. three working days.
- Academic Advisors should regularly interact with Teaching, Learning and Student Experience (TLSE) colleagues, and should communicate feedback and any issues to the relevant team.
- Academic Advisors should familiarize themselves with programme structure, handbook, academic calendar and related events.
- Academic advisors should be able to provide advice on programme structure and degree regulations after seeking guidance (if necessary) from the relevant TLSE team.

### *Rationale*

- Students can benefit from the advice and support provided by an academic coach or mentor who takes an interest in their academic development and progress. Academic advising is an efficient way of establishing a personal and motivating relationship with an academic member of staff who will support the student throughout their academic studies.
- This personal relationship can help students feel that the School is an approachable learning community. The intention is to stimulate a learning culture that enables students to achieve their full potential through a supportive and integrated academic environment. A student's sense of identity with their programme and/or Department is developed through effective academic advising.
- Academic Advisors are *not* "personal tutors". The main point of departure for the Academic Advisor is to address *general academic issues* with their students. Pastoral support is provided for through a variety of other University services (see "Services, support and resources" on page 7). However, Academic Advisors need to be sensitive to the potential overlap between "academic" and "personal" matters. The academic advising role as set out here is designed to be strictly within the competence of *all* academic members of staff.

*Academic advising should be a partnership in which:*

- It is the responsibility of Academic Advisors to be proactive in communicating with their students, to be well-organised, informed, and enthusiastic, and to take responsibility for fulfilling the academic advising role as set out above;
- It is the responsibility of students to engage with their Academic Advisor in order to realise the intended benefits;
- The principles of collaboration between staff and students as set out in the [Student Charter](#) are honoured. The relationship between Academic Advisor and students should be an exemplar of this collegial relationship.

*Academic Advisors are NOT expected to do any of the following:*

- Undertake counselling duties, or any kind of support role beyond the above, that they are not qualified or do not feel qualified to do – this includes pastoral, medical or welfare support. Most of these functions are carried out by other officeholders in the School and the University. Please note that qualified staff should take up the specialist needs of students and it can be counter-productive to take on too much responsibility in these areas, even with the best intentions.
- Take the place of a course unit tutor of any kind – the course unit tutors/course directors are there to give substantive feedback and advice on specific course-related issues.
- Provide detailed advice about individual course units.
- Provide extensions for course work or other mitigation; or provide opinions on the outcome of Boards of Examiners
- Be primarily responsible for monitoring work and attendance requirements, though academic advisors will contribute to monitoring engagement and attendance.
- Give their private contact details to students, or meet them outside University working hours.
- If Academic Advisors from outside SoSS are consulting this guide, please refer questions on degree regulations, programme structure, and mitigation to the relevant undergraduate office (in the School where the student's degree programme is administered).

## **Academic Advising coordination and administration**

*All students*

- (i) Keep attendance lists and a brief record of meetings and interactions with students, for example in a simple Excel spreadsheet (see p. 5 in Part 2). Substantive records are only for the Advisor's own use, but keeping records is recommended for their use in tracking progress and engagement with advising, writing references, and handing over advisees. Absences from all **scheduled** meetings should be reported to [soos.wellbeing@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:soos.wellbeing@manchester.ac.uk).
- (ii) The Advisor's office hours should be made clear to advisees, as should contact details and the best ways of contacting the Advisor to book an individual appointment. Ideally this information should be included in an e mail signature.
- (iii) Refer students to other agencies within or outside SoSS as appropriate. (Note the "If...then" [FAQs] section below)

- (iv) Clarify issues of confidentiality – typically, discussions will remain confidential, but occasionally information needs to be shared among immediate colleagues if this is in a student’s best interests.
- (v) Providing references: this may be anything from signing a confirmation of study form to providing a vocational or academic reference. Sources for the reference should include the students’ marks, information from their file, and records of academic advising meetings. Students should be made aware that if they have not pursued contact with their Academic Advisor, any reference is likely to be terse at best. There are template references available on SharePoint for all UG students here : <https://livemanchesterac.sharepoint.com/sites/UOM-HUM-SOSSRH/Academic%20References%202022/Forms/AllItems.aspx>.

#### *First year UG students*

- (i) An initial group meeting with the Academic Advisor’s new **first year** advisees will take place during welcome week/week 1. These meetings will be timetabled by the Information and Guidance (IAG) team as part of the welcome week/week 1 activities. Please check with your Programme Director (or email [SoSS.hub@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:SoSS.hub@manchester.ac.uk)) if you are unsure when your first group meeting is taking place. Some general guidance on how to conduct these meetings is set out later in this guide. Departments/programmes may wish to provide tailored guidance for the content of the meeting so do check with your Programme Director to see if there is additional guidance provided. At the end of this group meeting students should be asked to sign up for individual face-to face meetings with the advisor for the following week.
- (ii) The purpose of the individual meetings is to cement a relationship between the student and the advisor and allow the student to raise issues that might be directly relevant to their studies. Academic Advisors should then inform the Student Support & Wellbeing team of any students that have not attended these meetings (along with any issues arising from the meetings that need follow-up from the SoSS Student Support & Well-being team).
- (iii) **In the fifth week of the second semester**, a further individual meetings should be arranged with students to discuss their first semester results. At the beginning of the second semester, advisors should explain the arrangements within Departments for providing guidance on second year course choices.

#### *Second and third year UG students*

- (i) At the **beginning of the first semester**, and in **week five of the second semester of the second and third years**, Academic Advisors are asked to contact their students and invite them to attend individual meetings. Academic Advisors should be prepared to discuss e.g. exam results, feedback on assignments, and help students plan ahead

#### *Minimum number of contact points for all students*

The University’s [Policy on Advising Taught Students](#) requires that each Advisor will make contact with their advisees **at least twice per semester during each year of study**, and **at least one of these contacts should be through a one-to one-face-to face meeting**. Further [guidance](#) on the University’s requirements for advising is available here. Note the University Policy and Guidance on Advising is in the process of review at the time of writing, and revised versions are expected in October 2023.

## Services, support, and resources for Academic Advisors

- The [Academic Advising Toolkit](#) is the key University resource to support academic advising. You can access the online Academic Advising training course and links to other University support services here.
  - The [Student Support](#) intranet pages contain lots of useful information on the support available across the University.
  - At the beginning of the academic year, Academic Advisors will receive the names of their advisees, their programme of study, and the venue for the group meeting with first year students, as appropriate. The Information and Guidance Team will link Academic Advisors to their students on Campus Solutions.
  - This guide will be made available at the start of Semester 1. Programme Handbooks are available online on the [SoSS intranet pages](#). It will help the Academic Advisor if s/he has a working knowledge of the undergraduate regulations and the programme structure for the programmes they are advising on.
  - Advice will also be provided by your Head of Department, the Senior Academic Advisor (see below), and the Departmental teaching and learning leads.
  - Experienced academic colleagues are also a good source of advice. Heads of Department are responsible for managing the academic advising process locally. They are supported by PS colleagues in the Information and Guidance Team who will allocate advisees, notify Academic of Advisors of this information, update Campus Solutions and deal with any queries relating to allocations
  - The staff in the Student Support Hub should be available at short notice to answer any pressing questions relating to Student Engagement, development activities, interruptions, withdrawals and change of programme information.
  - The Academic Advisor role is supported by Campus Solutions; you can also find out how to access information on advisees here:  
<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=11227>
  - The Equality & Diversity team run a useful web site:  
<http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/equality-and-diversity/>.
  - The Supporting Students pages on StaffNet offer advice and training resources  
<https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/supporting-students/training/>
  - As a University community, we believe that bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and discrimination are never acceptable. If a student discloses any of these issues, a useful first step is to help them to access the **Report and Support** tool, where they can report something anonymously or speak to a trained advisor for help and guidance  
<https://www.reportandsupport.manchester.ac.uk/>
- Specialist support is available for students who have involved in gender-based violence, hate or harassment from the University's [Advice and Response](#) service
- The Library's My Learning Essentials series contains some excellent study skills resources for students.  
<https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/students/training-and-skills-support/my-learning-essentials/>

## Division of responsibilities between the Academic Advisor & other School roles

Academic Advisors will find that they need at various times to cooperate with other kinds of tutors and other staff within the School. These notes give some indication as to who is available to confer with if intra-School referral or cooperation is needed, and who has what responsibilities.

### **BA(Econ) Programme Director and Associate Directors**

The Programme Director for BA Economics is Panos Sousounis (([panagiotis.sousounis@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:panagiotis.sousounis@manchester.ac.uk)). The Programme Director is assisted by five Associate Directors each with a specific area of responsibility. They are:

Angie Wilson (Student Support and Welfare) [angelia.r.wilson@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:angelia.r.wilson@manchester.ac.uk)

Wendy Olsen (Student Voice and Student Experience) [wendy.olsen@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:wendy.olsen@manchester.ac.uk)

Vlad-Andrei Porumb (Student Support and Welfare + AMBS lead) [vlad-andrei.porumb@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:vlad-andrei.porumb@manchester.ac.uk)

Shomak Chakrabarti (Assessment, Feedback and Progression) [shomak.chakrabarti@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:shomak.chakrabarti@manchester.ac.uk)

Sofia Izquierdo sanchez (Curriculum, Employability and Programme) [sofia.izquierdosanchez@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:sofia.izquierdosanchez@manchester.ac.uk)

For other programmes within SoSS, these roles are carried out by the Programme Directors/Year Tutors.

### **Programme Directors**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Programme Directors</b>
BA Economics	Panagiotis Sousounis
BA Social Sciences	Tatjana Kecojevc
BA Philosophy	Joel Smith
BA PPE	Stephen Ingram
BSc Economics	Klaus Schenk-Hoppe & Craig Webb
BSocSc Politics & International Relations	Shogo Suzuki
BSocSc Social Anthropology	Sonja Dobroski
BSocSc Sociology	Simin Fadaee
Ba Criminology	Emily Turner
LLB Law (Old programme)	Ashley Hannay & Harriet Lipkin
LLB Law (New programme)	Joanne Urmston
LLB Law with Politics	Joanne Urmston (Year 1 &2) Rachael Ntongho (Year 3)
LLB Law with Criminology	Joanne Urmston (Year 1 &2) Rachael Ntongho (Year 3)
Law with International Studies	Ruth Lamont

If you need advice regarding a particular student, or the specific procedures pertaining to that student's programme of study, please ask the relevant Programme Director. This could be, for example, when some permission is sought or some decision is needed regarding a student's status.

### ***Other Academic Advisors***

You may find it helpful to speak with other Academic Advisors. This is a good way of finding out how academic advising is practically achieved; it can be a source of clarification and reassurance and offers the protection of a second opinion.

In 2021-22 the School appointed 12 full time specialist Academic Advisors (initially referred to as Senior Tutors) as a pilot project. The pilot project has been extended until July 2024 and these specialist SoSS Academic Advisors are another useful source of information and may be able help other Academic Advisors, particularly those advising students on the large multi-disciplinary programmes. You will find a full list of SoSS Academic Advisors and their area of specialism is in part two of this guide at p. 29.

### ***School of Social Sciences Senior Academic Advisor***

The Senior Academic Advisor for SoSS is Caroline Hoyle ([caroline.hoyle@manchester.co.uk](mailto:caroline.hoyle@manchester.co.uk)). The Senior Academic Advisor is responsible for developing academic advising strategy, and monitoring and enhancing academic advising practice across the School of Social Sciences. If you need advice and guidance on a specific issue relating to academic advising then she may be able to assist.

### ***School of Social Science Employability and Study Skills Lead***

The School lead for Employability is Manuel Mosquera-Tarrio ([manuel.mosqueratarrio@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:manuel.mosqueratarrio@manchester.ac.uk)). Manuel also co-ordinates the Study-Skills support across the School. If you need advice and guidance on the additional study skills available to students, then Manuel can advise you.

Note that a series of Study Skills workshops will run each semester covering topics such as essay writing, referencing, and presentations. The workshops are supplemented by weekly drop-in sessions. The Study Skills workshops and drop-ins are open to all SoSS student. You can contact Eddie Odudu ([edward.odudu@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:edward.odudu@manchester.ac.uk)) for further information and students can find details of the workshops and dates/times on the Study Skills area on Blackboard.

### ***Student Support and Wellbeing (SSW)***

SoSS has a dedicated Student Support and Wellbeing team, based on the ground floor of the Arthur Lewis Building. The Student Support and Wellbeing team is responsible for student wellbeing and welfare support, engagement/attendance monitoring (EMA), Interruptions and Withdrawals and processing mitigating circumstances applications. The team also includes the school Disability Coordinator.

The School's experienced TLSE Coordinators in Student Support and Wellbeing support UG/PG across all programmes. They undertake hands-on welfare work with a growing caseload of SoSS students. They can advise you if you have a student in immediate need of referral, or if you need general advice concerning a student's mitigating circumstances. They can help you access support within the School and from specialized University services, and can normally do this at short notice.

The team members responsible for EMA can provide details of a student's attendance and engagement with Blackboard on request and can also tell you if a student is already known to the support services. They may contact you regarding advisees who appear on non-attendance reports.

The Disability Coordinator liaises with the Disability Advisory & Support Service (DASS) directly, and can advise all academic staff on disability support.

Contacting Student Support and Wellbeing : In the first instance the best way to contact student support is to email SOSS Wellbeing <[soss.wellbeing@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:soss.wellbeing@manchester.ac.uk)> so that your request can be directed to the most appropriate team member. If you have any queries team or about student support please contact Dr Ian Fairweather (Student Support and Development Officer <[lan.S.Fairweather@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:lan.S.Fairweather@manchester.ac.uk)>

## Academic or personal?

The following are common student comments that can occupy the grey area between academic issues and personal problems. They are illustrative of how the boundary between academic and personal can be approached and ascertained. In these and similar cases, the Academic Advisor should attempt to ascertain whether they are best considered as academic or personal matters, and find the best way to proceed accordingly. In most cases, there will be an effect on the student's academic work, so even if personal matters are not discussed it will be worth helping the student think about how they might adapt to the circumstances academically.

(i) *"I can't get on with my academic work because of personal problems"*

It is worth first of all thinking about whether personal problems are the cause of academic troubles, and not the reverse. Most of the time, the former will be the case – for example, a family member suffering from illness may take enough time from a student to have a serious effect on their studies, despite there being no other issues with the student's quality of work or attendance. It is possible, though, that the pressure of academic work may cause stress or have other deleterious effects which are then felt in the student's personal life. These could be, for example, where pressures of time create a time management predicament, which could lead to lower quality research for assignments and in turn to plagiarism. In any event, it is worth noting how the academic problems are being manifested, so as to help with and inform future discussions.

Before referring a student, it is useful to have enough information to make a judgement on the above; this will also give the student the opportunity to talk through the situation, which they will certainly appreciate. A rule of thumb might be: if there is clearly an academic or study skills-related *solution*, then it can be said to be an academic problem. If this is not the case, then it is a personal problem. In the case, aside from what advice they can give personally and depending on the circumstances, the Academic Advisor can suggest: seeing a BA(Econ) Pathway Director (as relevant); seeing the Programme Director, for other programmes; making a referral to the well-being team ; contacting the Counselling Service; or consulting the administrative staff in that Department or generally. Of course, the people running the student's programme must know about the discussion as early as possible. The Academic Advisor does not need to undertake a long conversation with a student for purely personal problems, but should be satisfied, if appropriate, that any suitable academic or study response has been discussed.

(ii) *"I feel that I'm on the wrong course"*

Changes of programme do occur, but where there is a genuine motivation to change programmes the proper channel is through the undergraduate admissions office, preferably after speaking to a Programme Director. Again, the Academic Advisor has a role in establishing whether there is a genuine reason for wanting to transfer, and whether this is best characterised as an academic or personal reason. The student may have experienced a genuine change of vocation, or may simply be (over-) reacting to some early difficulties, for example:

*"I'm not sure where the course is going at the moment and I feel unsettled."*

*"I feel as though everyone else on my course can cope with the work much better than I can."*

*"I chose my course simply on the basis of the subjects I took at 'A' Level, and now I've come to University I find there are all sorts of interesting new subjects I could be taking."*

In these cases, some discussion of the programme structure, progress thus far, or the nature of study in higher education, could be productive for the student. All of these are academic-related issues.

Where a referral is necessary, changes between SoSS programmes should be referred in the first instance to the Programme Director however they may also need to check with admissions the student meets the necessary programme requirements.

Transfers elsewhere within the University, or to other universities, need to be dealt with by the admissions office of the unit or institution that the student wants to transfer to. The BA(Econ) Pathway Directors can help with most transfers

between BA(Econ) pathways. Questions of degree structure and progress are best considered in conjunction with the relevant Programme Director and the Curriculum and Programmes Team [soos.courseunits@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:soos.courseunits@manchester.ac.uk). For instance, many degree programmes are structured so that a foundation is laid down in the first year, after which more freedom of choice and more scope for broader thinking is available in the subsequent years. It is useful to some students to hear the rationale and design of their degree made clear.

Finally, it is worth being aware that programmes of study may be at the centre of family politics. Students may not have chosen their degree, but registered on a programme out of duty or responsibility to their family, or to adhere to the conditions of a scholarship. It is good to be sensitive to this possibility and the demands these circumstances might make on a student.

(iii) *"I feel I'm not working at the right level"*

This is one of the most obviously 'academic' of the issues presented here. Lack of confidence about academic abilities can occur at any time, but can be particularly acute at the very beginning of a course, and at all levels immediately before or after significant assessment. Some groups of students are subject to specific stress in this area: for example, mature students who are returning to formal education after several years out may be concerned that they will not be able both to meet the demands of their course and to fulfil their domestic responsibilities. When students raise issues of their confidence in their academic abilities, the following areas of discussion may be useful:

- the basis on which a student is making a judgement about perceived lack of competence, including their marks to date;
- the uses a student has made of any feedback available on work to date;
- the gradual processes of learning that characterise university courses, in which each individual piece of work is a stage in a student's development;
- the benefits of comparing and exploring these concerns with other students;
- preferences in assessment types;
- upcoming opportunities in course units to improve prior performance;
- the importance of allowing for differences in learning styles and study skills/methods.

Clearly, what 'the right level' is will be amenable to discussion. It could just as easily pertain to the amount of work that the student is doing as it could to the quality of what they are producing. Once resolved, the same topic of appropriate 'level' of work or performance can be returned to in subsequent meetings as the point of departure for discussions of progress and development. However, where there is also a personal element involved, as with the mature student example mentioned above, the Academic Advisor may want to suggest to the student that they also seek help elsewhere for this.

Please note that many students will undertake some part-time work at the same time as their studies. This can be very productive in many ways, but it is not recommended that full-time students work more than about 12 hours per week.

(iv) *"My exam results are lower than I expected"*

The point here is to try to ascertain what is driving this comment. Again, it may have its origins either in personal or academic matters.

A prominent topic of conversation after exam periods will be to discuss exam performance. Meetings with Academic Advisors after those in the first semester of the first year are scheduled not least to allow a review of the exam period, so it is vital to make the exam review as meaningful as possible.

One way of starting this conversation is to ask the student what they *did* expect, and why. Some students, particularly at the beginning of their degree, may not be fully conversant with the way that marking works within the degree classes – for instance, 70% is a first class mark but still has 30% of theoretical 'improvement' possible. For better or worse, there

are different glass ceilings in operation in different kinds of discipline, so while 80% might be the highest practically achievable mark in some courses, it may be by no means the highest mark in others. This kind of discussion might be more marked with overseas students.

Sometimes these comments might be related to various study skills and acculturation matters. It is worth asking: has the student adapted to university life? Are all other things stable? Is there a skills issue at play, such as prioritising one or more exams at the expense of others, or some other time management issue? Does some attention need to be paid to essay writing or exam technique?

Occasionally, overseas students may have scholarships that are dependent year-to-year on them achieving a certain level of average mark. Sometimes, these scholarships (or even multiples of the scholarship) need to be paid back if these levels are not achieved. The student might therefore be under a lot of extrinsic pressure. It may therefore be a case of marks being lower than the student *needs*, rather than lower than they would like.

Lower marks than desired may of course be linked to various mitigating circumstances. A student's achievement should be placed in the context of any events that may have affected their performance. The Academic Advisor should be aware of how to refer students in a timely manner, but also how to build this in to the exam review. However, lower than expected exam results can themselves be a source of low mood and lack of confidence, so approaching exam results in a positive and productive manner can make a big difference.

Some proactive things that students can be encouraged to do include analysing their results for patterns in terms of where they are doing well or poorly – perhaps there is a difference between different kinds of courses or assessments. Obtaining and looking at their marked paper, talking with the marker, and thinking about their feedback, can reassure the student and inform them tacitly of the academic standards at work. Students can download their Grademark feedback and bring it to a meeting for discussion. Finally, what is their plan for doing better?

*Please note that due to the prevalence of anonymous assessment the Academic Advisor is best placed to discuss academic progress with their students.*

(v) *"I don't seem to have enough time for all my academic work"*

Again, there are many possible reasons why a student would make this kind of comment to their Academic Advisor. As usual, be wary of where and how this might implicate personal problems, and refer the student to suitable sources of support as necessary. The point here is for the Academic Advisor to approach this from an academic perspective.

It is possible that the reason for perceived paucity of time is external to their studies. Some students have dependents, are carers, and many will have part-time jobs. The University advises against taking on more than about 12 hours of paid work per week, and full-time work alongside full-time study is simply a bad idea. The University offers workshops in time management that can be suggested to students, which can be accessed via My Learning Essentials at the University of Manchester Library.

Beyond these matters, there are several ways of approaching academic work that might be implicated in time management problems. For new students, this might be something as simple as getting used to the independent learning that is required in higher education. Ask the student how they are planning and organising their work; whether they have a timetable set out for study time (as opposed to contact time); and what their general approach is to studying. It may be that a particular module is a worry and is taking up more time and attention than would be advisable; or perhaps a particular skill such as note-taking, refining the task, or reading is developing slowly.

As well as addressing any of these issues, you could encourage the student to get specialist help through office hours, PASS sessions if applicable, or through working with peers that are taking the same courses. If the student appears to have perfectionist tendencies or struggles with procrastination, he or she might be referred to the Student Welfare

Officers (or via them, to the Counselling Service). Finally, check that the student has a suitable physical environment for their studies.

List of common scenarios with suggested responses.

<b><i>If...</i></b>	<b><i>Then...</i></b>
A student suggests that a disability might be affecting their work	<p>If they are NOT registered with DASS for a permanent disability, suggest they contact DASS for an assessment. <i>This is a legal requirement</i>. Ideally the Academic Advisor should help the student to complete the DASS referral form. The student can decline the referral but a record must be made of what happens as a result of this referral</p> <p>If they are registered, contact <a href="mailto:soss.dc@manchester.ac.uk">soss.dc@manchester.ac.uk</a> to make sure that they are known to their tutors as having a disability.</p>
The student is talking about changing course/pathway, dropping out or intercalating, etc.	<p>Try to find out the reasons behind this as it may inform subsequent actions</p> <p>For course changes students should speak with the UG admissions team</p> <p>Otherwise, suggest that they speak with their Programme Director.</p>
You receive a third party enquiry	<p>Check whether the contact is made with student's permission, even if this is the student's parent; refer questions that concern personal matters within SoSS to as few people as possible</p> <p>When dealing with third party queries ensure that you are GDPR compliant</p>
Any kind of issue has occurred that may have affected academic performance	<p>Suggest that the student fills in a mitigating circumstances application.</p> <p>The student can also be referred to the Counselling Service/Welfare Support team as necessary.</p> <p>Ascertain whether the issue is best described as, and addressed as, a personal or an academic one</p>
The student has a complaint about an aspect of their studies or wants to make an academic appeal	<p><a href="#">Refer the student to the</a> guidance regarding complaints and/or appeals in the first instance. The guidance can be found <a href="#">here</a>. <a href="#">The Students' Union can advise and support students with appeals.</a></p>
You suspect that a student's English language skills are an obstacle to their studies	<p>Suggest that the student contacts the University Centre for Academic English which offers support with academic English. <a href="#">The Academic Success Programme</a> offers in-sessional workshops during each semester covering key skills such as academic writing, academic grammar, and academic speaking.</p>
You suspect that a student has motivation problems that are affecting their studies	<p>Discuss the possibility of an academic solution. Refer the student to the SoSS Student Support and well-being team if they need further specialist support.</p>

<i>If...</i>	<i>Then...</i>
	If a firmer line is needed, refer them to the Programme Director or a Pathway Director
You suspect that a student needs study skills support, or the student has communicated as much to you	The student can be referred to the 'My Learning Essentials' resources on the University of Manchester Library page; these include bookable sessions, drop-in sessions, and on-line resources.  The School of Social Sciences offers a series of Study Skills support workshops run by Eddie Odudu (email: <a href="mailto:Edward.odudu@manchester.ac.uk">Edward.odudu@manchester.ac.uk</a> ). Details of the workshops running each semester can be found on the SoSS Study Skills Blackboard pages.
A student is asking for an assignment to be re-marked	Inform the student that assignments cannot be re-marked on demand; suggest that the student contact the relevant course director/marker in the first instance to clarify anything that they do not understand in their feedback.  Offer to discuss feedback for this assignment with the student
A student is asking about information on post-graduate applications and/or scholarships	Refer the student to the PG admissions office on the second floor of the Arthur Lewis Building; or help them find the School's on-line information. The Careers Service may also be able to help.
A student wants to know how to submit for mitigation circumstances	Direct students to the online form at <a href="#">Help and support - School of Social Sciences - The University of Manchester</a> ; make student aware that evidence is generally necessary to support the claims in the form
A student is asking for an extension to a course work deadline	Refer the student to <a href="mailto:soss.mitcircs@manchester.ac.uk">soss.mitcircs@manchester.ac.uk</a>

### Some general tips

A student that has a diagnosis of a **permanent disability** or whom you think may have a permanent disability must be immediately referred to DASS. This is a legal requirement under the Equality Act 2010. By all means get advice from colleagues but act quickly. Make records of what you have done; including if the student refuses the referral. Further guidance is available here:

- <http://www.dso.manchester.ac.uk/>

You might find it helpful to learn something about the [Counselling Service's stepped-care model](#). This is a tool that the University has developed to support staff in assessing the level of intervention needed. Among other things, the model suggests that student referrals should be the "least intensive of those available", which at the time of writing is understood as a local (School) referral unless there is a compelling case for a referral outside the School. The Counselling Service offers a range of training packages aimed at enhancing understanding of mental health and student support. For further details go to : <http://www.counsellingservice.manchester.ac.uk/trainingforstaff/>

It is acknowledged that Academic Advisors are not trained for counselling or having difficult conversations. However, investing even a few minutes in **listening** and noting what the problem is will be reassuring to the student and useful for colleagues. If a student is e.g. very upset or angry, inform them of who you would like to refer them to or involve in the conversation, and why. It is possible to get students to the right person quickly while also making them feel that their problem is being taken seriously.

Although this guide has suggested that Academic Advisors should not generally be evaluating or providing all the answers to their students, try **closing the circle** when you have given them something to do or investigate. For instance, if you have suggested that a student should draft a CV and take it to the Careers Service for improvement, do not offer comments on the CV yourself. Check that they have done this and see if any further progress is necessary.

Make sure that you are compliant with **data protection** legislation when you are considering involving third parties for academic advising purposes.

<https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/gdpr/what-is-gdpr/> Please see below some links to guidance on writing **references**. Many references, though, do not need composition and are more like a box-ticking exercise, e.g. verifying that the candidate was a student at the University.

- University guide to writing references for students:  
<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=1921>
- Additional advice on references from the President:  
<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=12084>

## Students' University Experience

For some students, the university experience is a new one, for a variety of reasons which include but is not limited to students:

- from low income backgrounds and low socioeconomic groups;
- who are the first in their generation to consider higher education;
- who have experienced care;
- who have a disability;
- who are young carers;
- from under-represented ethnic backgrounds.

As an Academic Advisor, it is important to note that you might be dealing with a wider range of students, with different experiences and academic backgrounds. The School of Social Sciences has recruited a team of specialist full time School Academic Advisors (formerly referred to as Senior Tutors) who have taken on specialist roles and can provide additional support to these groups of students. A full list of SoSS Academic Advisors and their area of specialism appears in part two of this guide.

If you come across students struggling with their personal welfare as a result of their different experiences and need advice on issues such as mitigating circumstances, have queries on interruption or need signposting to specialized support, please refer to the Supporting Students pages for further guidance.

### Supporting students:

[www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/supporting-students/particular-circumstances/](http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/supporting-students/particular-circumstances/)

- < StaffNet
- ✓ Supporting students
  - Training
  - Responding to issues
  - Particular circumstances**
  - Employability
  - Policies
  - Your wellbeing
  - Contacts
  - Crisis

## Particular circumstances

Our diverse student population means our students may have varying or specific needs. The guidance below can help you to support them in navigating their particular situation.

- + Asylum seeker students
- + BAME students
- + Care experienced students/care leavers
- + Living at home/commuter students
- + Disabled students
- + Estranged students
- + International students
- + LGBTQ students
- + Parent and carer students
- + Sports scholars
- + Trans students

# My Learning Essentials

the Library's award-winning skills programme

**Blackboard**  
CATALYST AWARD



My Learning Essentials is a comprehensive programme of online resources and face-to-face workshops which will aid you in your personal and professional development.

Our workshops offer a relaxed group environment where you can try out new strategies for yourself while learning from and with peers.

The online resources cover everything from essay writing to managing your procrastination, and you can access them through the Library website from wherever you are, whenever you need to!



## FIND OUT MORE

Visit us online or follow us on Twitter to keep up to date with our latest new developments, and let us know if there are any other areas you'd like us to cover!

You will encounter the Library throughout your time at Manchester, but any time you want any support, we run workshops on academic skills throughout the year. See our website for more info.

 [www.manchester.ac.uk/my-learning-essentials](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/my-learning-essentials)

 @mlemanchester

## School of Social Sciences (SoSS) guide to Academic Advising – Part two

This section contains a list of materials and information useful for meetings with, or in communication to, students.

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## Correspondence to students

*To returning students at the beginning of the year*

Dear [       ]

Welcome back to the University – I hope you had an enjoyable summer vacation.

I am writing in my role as your Academic Advisor to invite you to arrange a meeting with me. As you know, these meetings are intended to follow your academic progress and improve your performance, where possible. For this reason, I would like to arrange this meeting as soon as possible. You should already be familiar with the arrangements for contacting me, although you may need to check the times that I am available this semester.

It would be helpful if you could come to this meeting ready to talk about what you hope to achieve in this academic year.

Please note that during or after you have completed your studies, it is likely that you will need a reference. For me to be able to write a meaningful reference for you it is necessary that you maintain regular contact with me and keep me informed of your achievements and career plans. A meeting early in the semester would be the ideal start.

Kind regards

*To all students ahead of Week 5 meeting in Semester 2 (to be sent Week 4)*

Dear [       ]

By now all results from the first semester have been published, and you should be aware of your marks and overall performance so far this year. I am contacting you in my role as your Academic Advisor to invite you to make an appointment with me to discuss your academic progress. You should already be aware of how you can best contact me, and the times I have available for these meetings.

As you know, it is strongly recommended that you arrange and attend meetings with your Academic Advisor, as this is the intended way of tracking and improving your academic performance.

First and second year students should be aware that options meetings for each discipline will take place after Easter. These will help you to select modules for next academic year.

Kind regards

**Academic Advisor individual meeting form**

Student's name:

Year:

Academic Advisor's name:

Date:

Discussed:

Action:

I consent to this information being released to members of staff in the University on a need to know basis.

Student's signature: .....

Record of student interactions

[ NewInteraction\_(ALT+I) ]

**Name:**  
**Student ID:**  
**Programme:**  
**Comments:**

---

---

**Date:**  
**Mode:**  
**Issue:**  
**Action:**  
**Signposted:**  
**Comments:**

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## Suggested topics for meetings

### 1. First group meeting with first years

Having done some form of icebreaker/getting-to-know-you, academic advisors can start the session introducing themselves and explaining the coaching role of the academic advisor. Give students some examples of the issues that can come to you with, and explain the importance of developing a good relationship with you. Tell students how they can contact you to book an appointment and when you plan to hold your regular office hours. Explain that the academic advisor will be primary responsible for writing a reference and it is much easier to write a helpful reference when you know a student well.

This will be a session with a fairly small group, so your usual techniques for getting the most out of tutorial discussion (such as working in pairs) will be useful here. Some ideas for additional areas for discussion are set out below:

#### Transition to Higher Education

- “How are you settling down?”
- “What expectations do you have of life as a student here?”
- “What expectations do you think people will have of you?”
- “What kinds of questions do you have in your mind as you look at the year ahead?”
- “What do you think the challenges will be in your first year?”
- “Are you prepared to be an independent learner?”
- “What are you most looking forward to, and most apprehensive of?”
- “Have you thought about the differences between learning at university and in your prior education?”, and so on.

Plagiarism/malpractice (The first year students will already have had a brief presentation on plagiarism and academic malpractice as part of their induction schedule)

- “Are you familiar with the idea of plagiarism? Can you explain what it is?”
- “Why is it seen as important in universities?”
- “What are ways of avoiding plagiarism?” and/or “What are the good habits to get into?”
- “What are other forms of academic malpractice?” (these are mentioned in the Guidance on Plagiarism in most undergraduate handbooks)

#### How instruction is given in universities

- This can include how lectures and tutorials/seminars work in conjunction.
- How office hours can be used as an additional resource for contact with academics. Please encourage students to make use of module support office hours, as well as academic advising hours.
- How to get the most out of these forms of instruction (for example, by being active in seminars/tutorials, taking notes efficiently, following up questions out of class).
- It would be useful to discuss the mutual hopes in terms of instruction and learning in a blended or online context.

Where particularly notable questions or topics come up, or if students have very specific concerns then you may want to suggest that you can take up this discussion in the next (individual) meeting.

## **2. Individual follow-up meetings (first/second week of semester)**

By the time of the first individual meeting, all students should have had some experience of lectures, tutorials, and possibly been set some work (or undertaken some studying of their own volition). They may come with questions motivated by any of these. It is worth asking about the student's initial experience of instruction even if they do not volunteer it. Likewise, the topics from the group meeting can be followed up in the light of their early experience of instruction and degree-level work.

Discussion could also be focused on elements of motivation, study skills, and personal development. There is plenty of scope for referral if students have subsequent problems with specific study skills, but early on students may simply find it motivating to talk with an academic member of staff about approaches to note-taking, library skills, academic expectations and so on. In terms of personal development, academic advisors could encourage students to reflect on their learning, their longer term goals and aspirations, and how they intend to track or record their progress in achieving them. It might be particularly interesting to compare notes from this meeting with those taken in the student's subsequent years. Please also check that the student has registered with a GP and if needed remind them that a [GP practice](#) is available on campus in Crawford House.

## **3. Individual meeting in fifth week of second semester**

The purpose of the third meeting is to ascertain the student's progress after receiving all first semester exam marks and feedback for first semester course work. Please see the "Academic or Personal?" case studies above for some questions that might come up after examinations, and for some additional ideas for conducting an examination review.

### **(i) Exam/assessment marks**

Students will almost certainly have something to say about the exam/coursework marks they have received. Do encourage students to reflect on their approach to their performance. This gives the academic advisor the opportunity to ask:

- Where the student thinks that s/he has performed well/badly.
- The reasons for that performance.
- What understanding the student has of the respective marking criteria and classification system.
- What the student needs to focus on subsequently; what can be improved.
- What the student is doing particularly well or badly in assessment.
- What plans need to be made on the basis of this exam performance.

NB:- work cannot be re-marked, nor academic judgement questioned.

### **(ii) Feedback**

Discussions on this topic could:

- Discuss the feedback that advisees have received on their work.
- Check that students have accessed both the individual and cohort feedback.
- Provide clarity and advice on how to improve their work for the next assessment, or suggest ways in which students could obtain this advice.
- Give advice on how to use the feedback that has been provided.

More generally, the discussion could address:

- The purpose of feedback (i.e. as allowing students to reflect both on their specific performance and generic skills).

- What grades mean in the light of marking conventions.
- Other methods of receiving and obtaining feedback, e.g. through office hours, and how to get the best use of office hours.
- What students should do if they wish to pursue a specific matter that has been brought up in their feedback (students should see the course director in the first instance, and then the undergraduate Director of Studies for that Department if necessary).

Overseas students whose performance is being affected by language competence should be encouraged to visit the UoM Centre for Academic English which offers a variety of in-session courses and support services.

#### **4. Second and third year meetings; induction for returning students**

Assuming that returning students have met regularly with their academic advisor, the personal relationship should be such that themes and issues particular to each student suggest themselves. A good starting point would be to ask the student what their goals/objectives are for the new academic year, and what obstacles they perceive to them achieving these goals. These goals can then be used to set objectives for the academic year ahead.

Moreover, second and third year students will have more results, feedback, and experience to form the basis of discussion. They will by this time have a trajectory to their marks that can be used as the basis of discussion.

For finalists, an important part of the discussion might concern what follows the degree, e.g. post-graduate study or employment. Although these matters do not assume expert knowledge on the part of the academic advisor – and citing useful contacts such as the Careers Service and/or post-graduate office will be necessary – mentioning these matters at the beginning of the year may serve as a valuable prompt for finalists. There is also no reason that they could not also be brought up with students at any level – in fact, some first year students will actively ask about career opportunities. So, although expert careers advice is not expected of academic advisors, the role is nonetheless useful in its potential to prompt and motivate students to think about careers.

In short, discussions with returning students should be both retrospective and prospective, using the student's experiences to date as a means of reflection, and using this reflection as a way of adapting future actions both for the remainder of their undergraduate degree and beyond.

See "Disengaged and overwhelmed: why do second year students underperform?"

<http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2015/feb/16/disengaged-and-overwhelmed-why-do-second-year-students-underperform>

Also see the case study on "My exam results are lower than I expected" in part one of this guide for ideas on how to approach an examination result review for all students.

## Useful links

### Academic Advising

University academic advising toolkit: <http://www.tlso.manchester.ac.uk/advising/>

Humanities academic advisor guidance:

<https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/humanities/teaching-support/resources/academic-advising/>

### Regulations

SoSS undergraduate intranet:

<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/student-intranet/undergraduate/>

Taught degree regulations:

<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=13147>

University of Manchester student charter:

<http://www.yoursay.manchester.ac.uk/student-charter/>

### Central University services

All support services are listed on the Supporting Student pages at

[www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/supporting-students/responding-to-issues/](http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/supporting-students/responding-to-issues/)

The **Responding to issues** page allows you to use the student's particular issue as a starting point to navigate to the appropriate source of support.

### Wellbeing (including Mitigating Circumstances)

Staffnet "supporting students" pages:

<http://staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/supporting-students/>

Guidance to students on mitigating circumstances:

<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/student-intranet/undergraduate/help-and-support/mitigating-circumstances/>

The Signposting section of the Academic Advisor toolkit

[www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/tlso/toolkits/academicadvising/advisingtopics](http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/tlso/toolkits/academicadvising/advisingtopics)

#### Nightline

The telephone number is on the reverse of your student ID card.

<http://manchester.nightline.ac.uk/contact-us/>

Nightline is a confidential listening and information service run for students by students. They offer anonymous, non-judgmental and non-directive support for all callers, regardless of the situation.

They are open for calls between 8pm and 8am.

### Employability

A careers guide for staff supporting students:

<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=22496>

University guidance on writing references for students:

<https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/tlso/toolkits/academicadvising/advisingtopics/employability/reference-writing/>

Guidance for students from the Careers Service on references:

<https://www.careers.manchester.ac.uk/applicationsinterviews/faqs/references/>

### **Study Skills Support**

My Learning Essentials

[www.manchester.ac.uk/my-learning-essentials](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/my-learning-essentials)

English Language Support (University Centre for Academic English)

[Academic Success Programme](#)

Academic Malpractice

<http://www.regulations.manchester.ac.uk/guidance-to-students-on-plagiarism-and-other-forms-of-academic-malpractice/>

You can also refer students to the Study Skills Blackboard space.

### **Welcome**

<https://www.welcome.manchester.ac.uk/>

### **Transitioning to life at University**

All new UG students will have access to this [interactive resource](#) on transition to University.

### **Crisis Pathway**

If you have significant concerns about the mental health of a student the [Crisis Pathway](#) developed by the University Counselling Service can be useful in determining the next steps.

## SoSS Academic Advisors

In 2021 the School appointed a team of full time School academic advisors to support first year UG students. In 2023-24 the School Academic Advisors will support year 3 UG students. The School Academic Advisors (SAAs) have developed areas of specialism and can offer additional support to all students in the School in the area of their specialism. Please see the list below of the SAAs, their contact details and their area of specialism.

Name	Email	Programmes	Specialism
Dr Jonathan Farrell	Jonath.farrell@manchester.ac.uk	BASS	Study Skills
Dr. Emile Chan	Chunam.chan@manchester.ac.uk	Philosophy, BASS,	Study Skills
Mr. Wayne Ramwell	Wayne.ramwell@manchester.ac.uk	Law/BAEcon	Mitigating circumstances/welfare support
Mr. Francis Joash	Francis.joash@manchester.ac.uk	Criminology	Mitigating circumstances/welfare support
Dr. Hawraman Ali	Hawraman.ali@manchester.ac.uk	BAEcon, Politics	International students
Dr. Zhiqin Wu	Zhiqin.wu@manchester.ac.uk	Law	International students
Dr. Ben Springett	Benjamin.springett@manchester.ac.uk	Law	Transition
Dr. Denise Vargiu	Denise.vargiu@manchester.ac.uk	BAEcon	Transition
Dr. Gary Donnolly	Gary.donnolly@manchester.ac.uk	BScEcon	WP/first generation
Dr. Joann Wilkinson	Joann.wilkinson@manchester.ac.uk	BASS, Sociology	Interrupting students
Dr. Vlad Schuler-Costa	Vlad.schulercosta@manchester.ac.uk	Anthropology, Law	Mental health support