

Office of Student Support and Services
Review of Support for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Students in Schools

REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In December 2004, the *Student Support Strategic Plan* (see Appendix 2) was approved by the University. In it, a commitment was made to deliver student support 'in a co-ordinated manner so as to provide 'coherent and integrated academic and personal support and guidance for students' and that support would be provided by 'staff who are properly trained and supported in these roles'. It was anticipated that in this way progress would be made on Goal 4 of *Towards Manchester 2015: Excellent Teaching and Learning: to provide students with support services, learning environments, teachers and teaching and learning infrastructure equal to the best in the world*.

In November 2005 the QAA Institutional Audit report identified 'the overall institutional pastoral support provided for students' as a feature of good practice and noted the proposals for refining and strengthening the existing system. They discussed these proposals with student groups in Schools which were audited and noted that students welcomed the University's proposals for professionalizing the provision for personal support.

The review originates from recognition of the size and complexity of today's student population and a perception that the traditional notion of personal tutoring can not be scaled up further to meet the numbers of students currently in HE and is no longer sufficient. This has led, in many areas, to a diminution and dilution of the quality of support available to students.

The purpose of the review is to ensure that at The University of Manchester we offer support which is fit for purpose and makes best use of the resources available. It is unrealistic to expect individual members of academic staff to combine expertise in student welfare issues with their responsibilities in teaching and learning and research. Nor is it realistic to suppose that a single member of staff can hold all relevant information about any individual student, whereas teams with the appropriate responsibilities should be in a position to take such an overview when required.

The aspiration is to achieve a strengthening of support in which academic and administrative staff work in partnership to achieve improvement throughout the system, leading ultimately to a support system which is consistent and excellent across the University.

Reviewing the role of academic staff in personal support for students should create space in which an *academic* relationship can be developed between individual academic staff and students, leaving the personal support to staff that are professionally trained and supported to carry out these tasks. Though it is acknowledged that personal and academic issues may be intertwined, it is envisaged that the location of dedicated support staff in Schools will facilitate the more seamless referral of students needing personal support, and thereby releasing academic staff to deal with the academic issues.

2. THE REVIEW PROCESS

The review was carried out under the sponsorship of the Vice-President and Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning. A Steering Group was established, chaired by Professor Kersti Börjars (Associate Dean for Undergraduate Affairs, Faculty of Humanities), and drawing membership from academic and administrative staff from across the University. (See Appendix 1 for membership).

Following assessment of practice elsewhere, the first step was to understand the existing arrangements for supporting students in Schools. An audit tool was developed (see Appendix 5a). The project team (Sarah Beer and Jenny Wragge) conducted face-to-face meetings with members of staff in every School to work through the topics in the audit tool. A very broad approach to student support was taken, so that the tool covered the student life-cycle beginning with information which was communicated to students before they arrived in Manchester and moving through induction before discussing existing personal support arrangements.

An important part of the audit was to discuss specific elements of student support in terms of who delivered them now, what rationale lay behind that, and how they might be delivered in future.

The project team also conducted a 'focus group' session with the Students' Union Council to gauge the views of students on what they needed from a student support system, and to discuss how it might best be delivered. Although the Students' Union Council members are not necessarily typical of the average student, particularly in terms of their likely raised awareness of systems and procedures around the University, it was felt that, as student representatives, they were in a good position to have a feel for student expectations. Students present covered all four Faculties.

The results of the audit are discussed in section 3.3 **Current Practice at The University of Manchester**. Together with the responses from the focus group, they have been used to inform the recommendations set out in Section 5.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Practice Elsewhere - UK

The UK system for providing personal support for students has long been focused on 'personal tutors' – members of academic staff responsible for monitoring the academic and personal welfare of small groups of students studying in their academic area. This system is a particular characteristic of UK HE and is not common elsewhere; international colleagues are often perplexed by the requirements on them to provide personal tutoring.

Mass Higher Education, combined with the pressure to deliver excellence in research and teaching, has brought the UK personal tutoring system under pressure in many instances, particularly in academic schools/departments where there is a large number of students who exercise considerable freedom of choice in the individual modules they study. The consequence of this has been that, in such schools/departments, members of academic staff find they are responsible for personal tutees whom they do not teach, and with whom they have no foundation for a relationship beyond the personal tutoring.

That this is an area of concern for many UK institutions is indicated by the large response to the first UK Personal Tutoring in Mass Higher Education conference, held at the University of Westminster in May 2005.¹ Whilst a large number of participants were operating from an acceptance of the premise of personal tutoring, and seeking an improvement to their own performance, there were also presentations from a significant number of institutions which had decided to review the way in which they delivered support and guidance to students. These HEIs indicated that pressure on staff, due to factors such as workload and concentration on research output, affected the efficacy of the personal tutor system. Another important factor which affected the efficacy of the personal tutor system within mass higher education was student diversity. The increasing numbers of students, both home and international, from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, and bringing sometimes severe problems in terms of

¹ *Personal Tutoring in Higher Education*, ed. by Liz Thomas and Paula Hixenbaugh, (Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books Limited, 2006).

disability, finances, mental well-being etc, means that offering support on a non-professional, good-will basis is no longer sustainable. It is too much to expect that academic staff will, on top of their teaching and research commitments, remain up-to-date with all the possible problems and issues that students will present. As a result HEIs in the UK are beginning to look at alternative models in which non-academic student advice is delivered by appropriately trained and supported non-academic staff. Such staff are closely integrated with central support services but physically located in Faculties and Schools. They can also be joined into a network with their equivalent colleagues in other Faculties and Schools.

Some HEIs have preferred to strengthen the personal tutoring system by introducing more comprehensive monitoring and review. Accompanying this though has been a clearer definition of the role of a personal tutor which focuses on the academic support element (progress, personal development planning, references and advocacy), making it clear to tutors that they should refer students to the professional services provided by the HEI if they present with non-academic problems.

3.2 Practice Elsewhere - International

On-line research was conducted into the student support systems of institutions both internationally and nationally. Internationally the web was used to gather information from five comparable institutions (based on their student profile and world rank): namely University of Texas at Austin, University of Melbourne, University of California, Berkeley, National University of Singapore and McGill University (Canada).

There are two striking features of the provision of student support at these institutions. Firstly, there is high profile commitment to transition programmes, induction and study skills. Secondly, advice to students is delivered via offices staffed full time by professional advisers. The advisers provide advice on academic progression, course choice, regulations etc and also on personal matters affecting the students' work and progress. Academic members of staff are expected to be available to the students for purely academic, discipline-specific advice and teaching. Administrative tasks, e.g. tutorial allocation, are located as near to the source of activity as possible, thus students are expected to approach their academic departmental offices about such matters. The combination of support at departmental, faculty and central levels means that there is a network available to students by which they are able to access efficient support regardless of their entry point into the system. Students are expected to take responsibility for familiarising themselves with the support available and seeking help when they need it.

3.3 Current practice at the University of Manchester

3.3.1 Personal support and guidance

Definition of the role – while the role of a personal tutor tends to be described variously across the University in broad and general terms, the essential tenet is that a personal tutor is concerned with a student's general welfare, and is available to give help and advice on all matters whether academic or personal. How this is delivered and the resulting experience of students varies significantly, not simply between Schools and Faculties but also within Schools, according to the disciplinary culture and the aptitude and attitude of individual members of staff – this is exacerbated in the current environment by the absence of a clear statement of institutional expectation in this regard and the consequential reliance in many instances on the custom and practice of the predecessor institutions. The ability of the University to manage and meet students' expectations in a consistent way in such a context is a concern.

Role of administrative staff – several Schools including Arts Histories and Cultures, Social Sciences, Computer Science and Nursing have appointed non-academic staff to dedicated student support roles although the exact nature and scope of their responsibilities are varied. While other Schools have not identified a dedicated role as such, a number place considerable

emphasis on the role of staff in their School teams to act as an initial point of contact for students albeit that the expectation is that they will normally refer students to their personal tutor. In a number of instances it was reported that while the arrangement might not be formalised, non-academic staff assume a first line role dealing with student support issues principally because academic staff are not always available.

Models - all Schools operate a support and guidance system for students that is based on the notion of a personal tutor and the principle that all students should have access to an academic member of staff who plays a key role in providing general guidance and advice on academic and non-academic matters. While the detailed arrangements, including the specific responsibilities of the personal tutor, vary from school to school and in some instances between disciplines within schools, it is possible broadly to identify four models.

Integrated Model A – runs a personal tutorial and an academic tutorial scheme in parallel, in which the role of personal and academic tutor is combined in the same person. The academic tutorial scheme is common to all students, and usually follows a programme of work set by lecturing staff responsible for delivering core lectures.

Integrated Model B – as with A, a scheme which integrates personal tutoring and the academic curriculum, but in which the personal tutor and the academic tutor are usually separate individuals i.e., there is a programme of ‘personal’ tutorials which focus on skills awareness, PDP and give space for raising issues affecting the work. There is a separate programme of ‘academic’ tutorials related directly to course content. In this model the personal tutor may not teach on the academic tutorial scheme – hence not as closely integrated as in Model A.

Non-integrated Model – in disciplines with a high level of student choice and a minimal ‘core’ curriculum it is not possible easily to combine academic and personal tutoring. In this model the personal tutor scheme is run in isolation from the academic tutorial scheme; there are no academic tutorials outside those directly stemming from individual units.

Teaching Fellow Model – Teaching fellows are employed to run academic tutorials/lab sessions and deliver personal tutoring. They work closely with academic staff.

The integrated model(s) are used primarily in the science and related disciplines while the non-integrated model is a feature of disciplines in the humanities. The most developed example of the teaching fellow model is in the School of Psychological Sciences where the fellows are qualified in the discipline area to PhD level.

Foundations for personal tutoring - Schools that use an integrated model usually have agreed programmes or school-wide schedules of tutorial activity to be completed at agreed intervals through Year 1. While the exact content of the programme and the frequency of meetings varies between Schools the objective of this approach is both to support the students’ academic study and to facilitate the development of a relationship between academic staff and their students. This approach formalises the academic basis for the tutor/tutee interaction that critically underpins and facilitates the natural development of a useful and constructive relationship between academic staff and students. Where the non-integrated model is the norm Schools may specify the number of, and a timetable for, meetings to be held but the purpose of these meetings is usually prescribed only in general terms. There are real difficulties initiating and sustaining a meaningful interaction between tutors and tutees in these circumstances where there is no significant academic underpinning. This is most notable in the Humanities but especially for students on the Combined Studies programme where academic staff are assigned large groups of personal tutees for whom they have no other responsibility or basis for developing an academic relationship.

Progression through programme - the primary emphasis in many Schools is on the arrangements for new undergraduate students, with the preferred approach being to front load the support provided during the first year. This approach both recognises the issues of

transition experienced by students new to higher education, and anticipates that by providing students with sufficient grounding at an early stage it will stand them in good stead for their subsequent years of study and thereby reduce the ongoing burden of delivery upon staff during that time. In this way Schools provide individual students with the same personal tutor for the duration of their programme of study but the frequency of meetings, the nature of the interactions and the onus of responsibility will vary between the first and subsequent years of the programme. Typically the arrangements for first year students are more systematic and structured than for students in their later years. They tend to be tutor led and usually involve a defined number of scheduled meetings between the tutor and his/her group of tutees. All schools endeavour to ensure that students meet their personal tutor at some point during freshers' week. In subsequent years arrangements tend to be less formal and structured so that by the final year students are just as likely to seek advice and guidance from staff acting as a project or dissertation supervisor as from their personal tutor.

Personal development planning (PDP) - a theme emerging from the review has been a generally negative attitude to personal development planning. This is especially the case when it has been used as a stand-alone item on which to hang a personal tutoring relationship, usually in the context of the 'non-integrated' personal tutoring model. Adding PDP to a system in which the relationship between tutor and student is already tenuous simply compounds the problem since a genuine attempt at personal development planning requires a certain level of trust and confidence between student and tutor. There appears to be a lack of clarity about the purpose of PDP which has meant that there has been little realisation of instances in which the ethos and philosophy of personal development planning is in fact being delivered, but integrated into the curriculum. In these circumstances there are examples of Schools which, not appreciating that they already have PDP in everything but name, have created an almost completely meaningless paper exercise which is understandably viewed as pointless by both staff and students. There are notable exceptions, specifically in those areas where PDP forms part of the assessment requirements of a professional body (e.g. medicine, nursing, teaching etc.) and in parts of the University that use on-line facilities, most notably Combined Studies and Life Sciences.

Frequency of meetings - all systems have provision for students to meet with their personal tutor individually or in groups as part of an organised schedule of meetings and on request, usually during published office hours. While the majority of Schools provide students with the opportunity to meet their personal tutor at least once per semester a substantial number make provision for more frequent meetings. However, the practice for achieving this and the extent to which Schools are successful varies quite substantially. A concern noted by students, particularly in the Humanities, was the difficulty they had securing individual meetings with their personal tutor. This concern is matched by staff who report the difficulty they have getting students to attend personal tutorials.

Allocation - the allocation of students to tutors is normally carried out by administrative staff, although an academic colleague may undertake this task in the capacity of a programme director or director of undergraduate studies. The method of allocation ranges from detailed consideration of each individual student's personal file to a simple numbers exercise. Several Schools reported that as a minimum they seek to allocate students to academic staff with some knowledge, or role in the delivery, of their programme of study.

Size of group - the numbers of students allocated to any one member of staff varies considerably between Schools from approximately 5/6 in any one year up to in excess of 30. Since these numbers are per annum and therefore cumulative some staff can have personal tutoring responsibilities for nearly 100 students. A number of Schools operate a system whereby staff are assigned new students only in two years out of every three.

Postgraduates - most Schools reported that taught postgraduate students are assigned a personal tutor but that in many instances the small numbers involved mean that the role is often undertaken by the programme director. It is recognised, however, that this type of arrangement

is not ideal given the potential conflict inherent within it. Many students are unwilling to discuss personal issues or difficulties with staff who they perceive may in due course have a role in determining the outcome of their studies. Furthermore, in circumstances where a relationship may have become strained students need to have access to advice and support from a third party. This is not easy in circumstances where the same person is acting as both programme director and personal tutor.

Students on Combined or Joint programmes of study - in many Schools there is almost resigned acceptance of what are perceived to be the inherent difficulties of joint or combined programmes, especially where the disciplines concerned are located in different Schools. In many instances it is acknowledged that students who are registered for programmes that span more than one School do not receive the same experience as their peers who are registered on single honours programmes. While one School usually has primary responsibility for the students and acts as their 'home' they are often not fully integrated into that School and difficulties with timetabling and communication are not uncommon. Personal tutoring arrangements are often poorly organised and ineffective. It is of concern that there appears to be little coherence to the way combined or joint programmes of study are organised in the University.

Percentage of staff involved in personal tutoring - the requirement for staff to act as a personal tutor varies across Schools. While the majority of full time academic staff are expected to act as a personal tutor some Schools report that there are a number of exemptions. Others report that the assignment of individual staff to personal tutoring is determined as part of local work allocation arrangements so that not all staff are required in any one year while in a number of instances it was reported that only the Head of School is exempt from personal tutoring. In one School all 1st and 2nd year personal tutoring is conducted by a small team of teaching fellows specifically recruited for this purpose.

Quality of tutoring - it is universally acknowledged that the quality of personal tutoring varies between individual staff. While many staff take their responsibilities in this area very seriously, there are equally numbers of staff who afford it no priority and carry out their responsibilities at the most minimal level. A number of anecdotal reports were made during the review of colleagues who do not do what is required of them, delegate their responsibilities to more junior colleagues, publish office hours that are known to be inconvenient for students or do not attend for their published office hours. In one School it was reported that tutees are routinely allocated to staff who it is known will do a poor job but with the numbers of students to be supported there is felt to be no alternative. Clearly, an issue in a number of Schools is the fact that the staff with responsibility for administering and organising personal tutoring have insufficient managerial authority to deal effectively with issues regarding the performance or competency of their academic colleagues.

Responsibility for personal tutoring - there is no single role in Schools with assigned responsibility for the oversight of personal tutoring both in terms of arrangements and quality of provision. In practice it can be any one of a number, including programme director, director of undergraduate programmes, senior tutor or year tutor.

Training of tutors - the training provided and guidance given to staff engaged in personal tutoring is negligible. Beyond the material covered in the new lecturers' programme, only one School reported that it delivered any training to staff regarding their duties and responsibilities as a personal tutor. In the same School new staff are given a phased introduction to personal tutoring only assuming a full load after approximately three years in post. In another School one of the disciplinary areas has a programme of informal lunchtime seminars for staff that includes issues of personal tutoring. In the majority of instances, however, the arrangements appear to be fairly *ad hoc* and patchy. New staff may be inducted to the role on a one to one basis by a senior tutor or someone working in a similar capacity but in many cases it appears that staff rely solely on more experienced colleagues for guidance and support. The danger of this is the potential to perpetuate bad practice.

Resources - the range of resources available to staff to support them in their role tends to be limited but includes the programme handbook, details of the University's central support services and in some cases a copy of the Guide to Personal Tutoring produced in the VUM in 2001. With the exception of the Guide, the information provided to staff tends to be that which is issued directly to students and is therefore written from their perspective. It is not apparent that all staff are sufficiently informed as to the nature and scope of their role as a personal tutor and the boundaries to their responsibilities. It is not uncommon, for example, for staff to issue their personal contact details to their students. Staff do not routinely have access to additional practical guidance prepared from their perspective and developed as an aid to support them in their role. Consequently, practice can vary substantially between staff. For example, the circumstances in which a student will be referred to a specialist central service by a member of staff are not consistent. Some staff refer students regularly while others will do so infrequently.

Attitude of staff - there is evidence from a number of schools of an increasing ambivalence among staff to personal tutoring. This appears to be both in response to the perceived greater priority ascribed to other areas of academic activity and as a consequence of the increasing numbers of staff recruited from overseas with little or no experience of the British higher education system and the role of personal tutoring therein. The concept of personal tutoring is not known in many European countries and staff from those areas would have no expectation of undertaking this role.

3.3.2 Other issues

3.3.2.1 Communication and Information

In the majority of Schools it is the admissions and recruitment team, or equivalent, that has primary responsibility for sending registration and induction information to new students. In all cases the material is sent in hard copy although in some instances this may be supplemented by email correspondence or students may be referred to additional web-based material. Of particular interest in this context is the on-line pre-arrival information available to all new undergraduates in the Faculty of Humanities. This includes video clip presentations on a range of different issues and the facility for students to post questions and engage in an on-line dialogue with others prior to their arrival. Similarly, several Schools in the Faculty are developing on-line peer mentoring schemes that undergraduate students can access before they arrive at the University.

Once students are on programme and registered, Schools use a variety of different methods of communication. These include email, web announcements, plasma screens, notice boards, student pigeon holes and announcements in lectures. It is an almost universal view that the efficient, effective and timely delivery of mass communications to students is a challenge that is exacerbated by the resistance of students to use their University email accounts on a regular and systematic basis. Schools adopt various strategies to address this with the most notable being in the School of Physics that includes in the programme handbook(s) a protocol for students to follow in order to forward mail from their University account to their preferred hotmail account. More generally, however, it is to be hoped that in the short term recent improvements to the University email service for students will alleviate this and in the longer term the development of a student portal will improve the University's ability to target relevant information to appropriate groups of students in more timely and efficient ways.

3.3.2.2 Induction and Orientation

Most Schools reported that the coordination and organisation of their induction programme(s) is an administrative responsibility although there is close liaison in the majority of cases with the relevant academic colleagues.

Programmes of induction for new students typically include:

Normally	Often	Occasionally
Welcome session, usually delivered by Head of School or Programme Director	Introduction to student representation system, and arrangements for elections	Field trips, outside visits, sight-seeing tours of Manchester
Programme specific information session (including, e.g. lab induction, PBL induction where relevant)	Meetings with Student Mentors	Help desk available throughout registration week
Social event – lunch, wine and nibbles	Other opportunities to meet fellow students, e.g. Student Societies for the discipline	Guided tours of campus
Details of special equipment requirements (where applicable)	Study skills sessions – “Studying at University”	Talks on Ethics, Careers Service, Money Management, Welfare support (e.g. Disability, Counselling)
Academic Registration	“Remedial” sessions – e.g. Maths diagnostics, English grammar	PGT joint sessions with PhD students - to bring them together as a research community.
Library Tour	Professional Societies (where applicable)	
Opportunity to meet with personal tutor	Sessions to take student photographs	
	Talks on Security/Safety/Occupational Health	
	Introduction to the relevant IT systems – login session, clusters, WebCT	
	Tours of other relevant facilities (e.g. Language Centre)	

Handbooks are often relied on to provide information about welfare support, the structure and organisation of the School and School administrative arrangements. They usually include a plagiarism statement for students to sign. In some cases this is the main source of information about plagiarism, in others there are specific sessions included during induction week. Plagiarism information is also often built into modules around study/transferable skills where these exist.

There is little evidence that the structure and content of local induction programmes is subject to any regular or systematic review. Instead the prevailing practice appears to be to roll forward the programme from the previous year with perhaps some minor changes or alterations. Little account seems to be taken of student feedback on induction arrangements or any assessment made of their effectiveness or the appropriateness of the content. A particular point made in the student focus group was that there is an over-reliance during induction on handbooks in which the content can be very dense and impenetrable, with little indication of those sections that are of particular importance. Steps to highlight and summarise key aspects of the information together with more signposting to services and facilities beyond the School would be welcomed.

For most Schools induction appears to be synonymous with Freshers' Week and while some Schools acknowledge that bombarding students with information on arrival is not particularly effective there is no clear evidence that induction as an ongoing aspect of student support is understood. There is, for example, only limited awareness of the possibility of holding induction (or refresher) sessions for returning students. Where these types of sessions are held, they are focussed on a particular demand for the year concerned. For example, some students undertake placements in their second year, so there is an introductory session held in registration week. Introductions to 3rd or 4th year projects are also often held during this time.

There is little evidence that Schools have considered whether there may be advantages to delivering aspects of induction at School level. An example of how this can be done effectively, at least at PGT level, is the induction programme delivered under the auspices of the SAGE programme in Arts, Histories and Cultures. There is no sense of an institutional approach to student induction that recognises the increasing diversity of our student body, the increasing importance of effective transition for students into the University or seeks to integrate the role of different parts of the University within an overall process. In the absence of an agreed institutional framework practice has evolved locally so that the experience of students varies considerably.

3.3.2.3 Peer support

There is clear evidence from a number of Schools and the work of the Students as Partners team that the availability of support from peers, both socially and academically, can enhance students' sense of belonging and aid their integration into their School. Peer mentoring and buddying schemes, discipline-based student societies, student representatives and student networks can all complement the more formal support provision available to students and should be encouraged. In the absence of any University-wide norms regarding these arrangements local practice varies and with it the quality of the student experience.

3.3.2.4 Student Diversity

An important part of the review was to seek to understand the extent to which Schools recognise student diversity and meet the challenges this can present. Students now enter university from a range of national, cultural, ethnic and social backgrounds, from different educational systems, at different ages and often with responsibilities for dependents such as elderly relatives or children. It is no longer sufficient to devise systems and procedures which are based on the assumption that the 'typical' student is aged between 18 and 21 and has studied A Levels in the UK education system.

With this in mind, Schools were asked whether they had particular practices designed and introduced to help meet the needs of any of the following categories of students:

- Students from overseas
- Students with a disability
- Students who live at home (i.e. and 'commute' to University instead of living in student accommodation)
- Students with children/dependents
- Mature students
- Part-time students
- Students completing a compulsory part of their programme away from the University (e.g. on a placement or studying abroad)
- Distance learning students
- Students on joint or combined programmes of study

Students with a disability - all Schools have a Disability Support Coordinator who liaises with the DSO in supporting students with disabilities. In the overwhelming majority of cases this is a non-academic member of staff and in the small number of cases where this role is assigned to an academic member of staff it was acknowledged that it did not need to be.

Students from overseas - arrangements for international students typically include a special welcome session during induction week (e.g. a special lunch), plus the provision of information about English language classes. In some Schools new international students are required to undertake English language assessment and are then referred to the University Language Centre if further support is required. Some Schools run Writing Workshops for International Students. Some Schools make efforts to put international students in touch with other international students already in Manchester, either *via* pre-arrival email contact or through social events on arrival.

Students who live at home - one Faculty, Life Sciences, has a programme aimed to help better support and integrate undergraduate students who do not live within the student community.

Students with children / dependents - Schools are unlikely to have information about the number of their students with childcare or other dependent responsibilities. Where these do come to their attention – e.g. through timetabling difficulties – the general approach is to deal with them flexibly on a case by case basis.

Mature students - are sometimes directed to the 'Mature Students' Adviser' where Schools are aware that this service exists.

Students on joint or combined programmes – one Faculty has instituted a Joint Honours Administrators' Network in an attempt to improve the delivery of support to, and administrative arrangements for, students on joint or combined programmes.

Part-time students – numbers of part-time students are small and arrangements for dealing with them tend to be developed locally as required.

Students completing a compulsory part of their programme away from the University (e.g. on a placement or studying abroad) – most Schools have at least one member of staff who is responsible for the co-ordination of arrangements for students who will be away from the University as part of their studies and acts as a first point of contact for the duration of that period. In some Schools students will retain access to their personal tutor during their period away and in one School personal tutors are expected to visit those students who are on placement in this country. Students in Italian have access to a web-based facility that enables them to find out about the year abroad and keep in contact with each other and the School while they are away.

Distance learning students – there is limited distance learning provision and it is predominately postgraduate. In the absence of a University wide support infrastructure Schools have tended to develop locally their own arrangements for dealing with all aspects of student support.

Although Schools were asked what specific arrangements they had for particular groups of students, this was intended not only to gain an understanding of their arrangements but also to probe their awareness of diversity issues. It was acknowledged that it is not effective or desirable to introduce a host of separate support arrangements targeted at different discrete groups of students. Instead Schools need to review their systems and procedures to assess their suitability and effectiveness in meeting the needs of a diverse population, and aim to implement systems which will provide a high quality and consistent experience for all students. Though it is not suggested that any group of student be singled out and provided with separate support, there may be some instances in which some such targeted support is necessary on a short-term basis. Evidence suggests that where specific support is offered more broadly, all

students benefit – for example, although mature students are often targeted with study skills sessions on, for example, essay writing, it is likely that all students would benefit from this type of provision. It is also the case that students often express the view that they prefer not to be identified as different, but want to integrate fully within their student cohort. For example, for many international students the opportunity to be immersed in all aspects of the host culture is a particular attraction of studying overseas.

3.3.3 Student focus group

In the focus group session conducted with members of the Students' Union Council, two extremes of experience of the existing personal tutor system were reported– either excellent or terrible. Those reporting an excellent experience tended to come from Schools which operated an 'integrated' model (see Section 3.3).

When asked how they would feel if the person fulfilling the role of a personal tutor was not an academic member of staff, the general response was that they did not really mind who undertook these duties, so long as somebody did. Students were primarily concerned that there be clarity about the arrangements in place and thereafter be assured that they work – “do what you say you're going to do”. They reported problems with their current experience such as never being able to contact their tutor, trying to see them in their office hours but having to compete in long queues with the tutor's academic tutees, bringing an issue to their tutor following referral from a School office only to discover that the tutor did not know what they were talking about. They felt frustration that their personal tutor was supposed to be a way into the 'bureaucracy' but often didn't seem to be 'in the loop'.

3.3.4 Results of student satisfaction surveys

In the 2006 student satisfaction surveys, of those students who reported that they had a personal tutor, 52% were satisfied, with a mean satisfaction score of 3.14. The proportion varied across Faculties with Humanities students being the least likely to be satisfied with arrangements for personal tutoring:

Satisfaction with Personal Tutoring

Humanities	39% (3.03)
EPS	55% (3.53)
MHS	60% (3.70)
Life Sciences	66% (3.84)

4. CONCLUSION

The current arrangements for the delivery of personal support for students are under strain. The high numbers of students to be tutored, the diversity of the student body and the increasing demands on academic staff have combined so that the quality and consistency of personal tutoring across the University can no longer be assured. This is consistent with the reported experience of colleagues across the HE sector nationally.

Schools have adopted a range of different practices to meet their responsibilities for personal tutoring. This parallels the national experience as institutions have adopted a variety of different approaches to the challenges they are encountering. While some Schools express confidence in their arrangements, particularly where staff-student ratios are relatively low, others are very aware of the weaknesses and would welcome guidance on the ways in which a different approach might be implemented.

For some there are real concerns about the tutor / tutee relationship within the current changing environment and a perception that any change to the traditional personal tutoring arrangements

is a threat that will further undermine the quality and value of this interaction and thereby the learning experience. On the other hand, it is recognised by many that further incremental development is not feasible so that a change of approach is needed which recognises the ongoing changes in HE both nationally and internationally, acknowledges the need to target and use limited resources effectively and is consistent with the strategic priorities of the University. It is therefore important to emphasize the positive aspects of change and the benefits that will be realised for both students and staff.

Personal support can include a wide range of tasks. These can be broken down to facilitate assignment by Schools according to their particular structure and / or discipline specific requirements.

The underlying philosophy is of a partnership between academic and administrative colleagues, but one which assumes that tasks should be delivered by a professional administrator unless there is demonstrable value to be added by the involvement of academic staff.

4.1 *Academic Advice*

Academic advice includes:

- advice and support directly related to the content of a course unit, e.g. in which a student wishes to clarify a particular concept;
- discussion of academic progress – feedback on examination/assessment performance, or formative feedback of on-going performance;
- discussion of the direction the student's academic programme might take; e.g. their interests, strengths/weaknesses etc in relation to course unit choice and/or the appropriate course units to choose for a particular specialism/pathway/interest.

This type of support is normally delivered by a member of academic staff, course unit leader, tutor, seminar leader or teaching fellow.

4.2 *Academic Progression*

Although this can be seen as simply another facet of academic advice, there is scope for a partnership approach between academic and administrative staff, depending on the complexity of the advice required.

Professional support staff can acquire a familiarity with academic regulations, the structure of programmes, the implication of particular course choices and the requirements for pre- and co-requisites across a discipline or range of disciplines to a breadth which might be unreasonable to expect of individual members of academic staff. Consequently, they may be well-placed to advise on, e.g.:

- course unit choice with relation to restrictions, co- and pre-requisites and implications for subsequent levels of study;
- ensuring students are fulfilling the credit requirements;
- rules surrounding re-examinations, interruptions, intercalations etc.

Academic staff having professional and expert knowledge about a particular discipline may be in a position to help students make decisions about course choices which relate to the student's strengths and weaknesses academically, and to their career plans or aspirations for further study. They may be the best source of advice about:

- course unit choice with relation to the student's abilities and potential in that area;
- implications for possible future career/study decisions;

- suggestions for alternative choices in the light of the student's likes/dislikes or strengths/weaknesses.

These areas will inevitably overlap on occasion; therefore it is important that a strong partnership is developed between academic and administrative staff advising students in these areas, with a clear understanding of boundaries of expertise.

4.3 *Monitoring Work and Attendance*

Monitoring work and attendance effectively is an important element of being able to identify early students who may be in difficulties, whether personal or academic. It is unnecessary for academic staff to be closely involved in the detailed analysis of work and attendance data, but they may have a role in recording attendance in those classes where the School has deemed this necessary, and in supporting administrative colleagues by providing class lists/up-dating student records in a timely manner.

Depending on the outcome of any issues highlighted through work and attendance monitoring, academic staff may have a role in providing specific specialist advice to students as described above. In some Schools, depending on structure, academic staff with particular designated roles (e.g. Programme Director, Senior Tutor, Year Tutor etc) may be more closely involved in work and attendance issues.

Purely administrative elements of this task, aspects of which can often be automated, would be expected to include:

- collating work and attendance data;
- analysing the data for prescribed breaches as determined by the School (e.g. missing from more than 3 consecutive classes);
- following School procedures in writing to students who are apparently absent.

Schools may designate the task of meeting with such students to a professional student support officer or to an academic colleague with a specific role (including that of personal tutor), or it may be something they undertake jointly. It is envisaged that colleagues with this role will be in a position to assess whether students have a particular problem and either to advise them directly or refer them to others as appropriate. For example, a student presenting with short-term illness might be reminded of the need to notify the School of absence and referred to the relevant academic staff for advice on catching up work, whilst others may need referral to the University's specialist support services, e.g. counselling etc.

Effective coordination of this process will facilitate accurate record keeping and ultimately expedite the work of bodies such as mitigating circumstances committees.

4.4 *Mitigating Circumstances*

There is an administrative task to be undertaken with respect to the collation of mitigating circumstances information. Centralising this function within Schools will benefit all students by ensuring that no information is overlooked. Both staff and students will benefit from clear directions about how mitigating circumstances should be handled and recorded – locating this task in one person or team will help to facilitate this.

Tasks include:

- collating, recording and presenting mitigating circumstances material to the appropriate committee;
- acting as a resource for both staff and students in advising of the procedure to follow in relation to mitigating circumstances;

- supporting students by assisting them, when necessary, to make arrangements for catching up with missed work, in liaison with academic staff;
- ensuring accurate record keeping, particularly bearing in mind the need for a paper-trail in the event of an appeal or complaint.

Oversight of decisions regarding the impact of mitigating circumstances should remain the preserve of academic staff within the appropriate body, whether mitigating circumstances committee or examinations board. A professional student support officer should however be in a position to offer advice, and will be aware of the need for consistency of practice and may implement decisions in certain cases within an agreed framework. As a member of the appropriate networks, they will be able to access advice and support from the Office of Student Support and Services and from colleagues in other Schools and Faculties.

4.5 *Study Skills Advice*

Recognising the transition in learning and study skills demanded in the move from secondary or further education to higher education is an acknowledgement that study at the higher level is rightly demanding, and requires a level and style of independent learning which may need development, together with the deployment of skills with which students may not be familiar. Devoting time and effort to enabling students to understand the expectations upon them and to help them acquire these skills will pay dividends in terms of their ability to realise their potential and to perform to the levels expected of them.

Skills and techniques which might be covered include, but are not limited to:

- essay and report writing;
- time management;
- personal development planning;
- the understanding and avoidance of 'academic malpractice' including plagiarism;
- skills of critical evaluation and analysis;
- techniques for full and proper referencing.

There are a number of ways in which these skills might be delivered, depending on the nature of the discipline and the structure of the School.

Students are likely to have different needs for support at different stages of their academic career.

Particular groups of students may have specific needs which can be addressed in a targeted manner; e.g. students returning to academic study after a period in the workplace, students entering undergraduate study from a 'non traditional' route, international students arriving with experience of different learning cultures. Whilst it is important to be aware of issues associated with particular groups of students, and to target support appropriately, feedback from students indicates that they do not wish to be singled out for special treatment. Ideally therefore, any targeted support will be offered with the aim of speedily integrating students with their colleagues.

Approaches to delivering this support may include any one, or a combination of:

- embedding skills delivery in the curriculum;
- specific study skills modules, possibly but not necessarily bearing credit;
- part of a relationship with an academic tutor or teaching fellow who is able to develop these skills in association with the academic programme of study;

- professional learning support staff as a resource at School/Faculty/University level (depending on the size of the individual Schools);
- WebCT/on-line learning.

4.6. *Advocacy*

There will inevitably be occasions when students either fall foul of the discipline regulations, wish to appeal against the decision of an examination board or progress committee, or have complaints. Evidence has shown that these situations are most effectively resolved when dealt with as close as possible to the location of the problem.

Supporting students in navigating their way through the relevant regulations may best be undertaken by a trained student support officer who is familiar with the regulations and who is connected to a network of colleagues around the University dealing with similar issues. Of primary concern is the need to treat all students in the University with fairness and consistency.

Tasks included in this area would cover:

- providing information about the appeals, complaints and discipline procedures, both in writing (in handbooks etc) and in person;
- explaining to students what the regulations mean and how to use them;
- in discipline cases, advising students facing accusations of academic malpractice – e.g. plagiarism, collusion – what this means, what the implications are and what their rights are;
- referring students to individuals or services within the University that are in a position to support them in constructing a case, or that will support them by appearing with them at appeal hearings, discipline committees etc.

It is probably not appropriate for a member of staff with this role actually to help students prepare their case. However well intentioned they may be, there are implications of conflict of interest which may undermine the perceived independence of the procedure, calling into question any decisions it comes to. Instead, students should be referred to the Academic Advisory Service or the Students Union Advice Centre for advice and support.

If a student has developed a good relationship with an individual member of academic staff (including a personal tutor), they may wish to ask that person to help them or appear with them. Provided that the individual has no other involvement in the case, this would not constitute a conflict of interest, but members of staff are not obliged to undertake this role unless they feel comfortable doing so.

4.7. *Personal Advice*

In the traditional personal tutoring system, giving non-academic advice to students has often fallen to personal tutors who may or may not be trained and supported in this role. The increasing diversity of the student population makes it more difficult for individual personal tutors to remain up-to-date with the range of services, sources of support and particular problems a student may present with.

A professional student support officer/team may be in a stronger position to support and advise students presenting with a range of individual problems or queries. They should be able to recognise where these issues may impact on the student's academic progress, and will be able to advise, refer and record appropriately.

The range of issues with which a student may present will include:

- emotional problems: stress, anxiety, bereavement, relationship breakdown;

- financial problems: money shortages, debt, overdue fees;
- administrative queries: lost swipe cards, how to get council tax exemption, timetable clashes, missed deadlines;
- ill health: procedures to follow, implications for longer term illness;
- accommodation difficulties.

Whilst it is not expected that a student support officer will become expert in all of these areas, it is anticipated that, through training, support and networking, they will develop an in-depth understanding of both how they can assist personally, and which other services a student can most appropriately be referred to. Experience reported by other institutions has shown that the role of student support officer is also a resource for academic staff. It is inevitable that students will approach potentially a variety of different staff members, including academic staff with whom they have developed a relationship. Having a student support officer available enables academic staff to support the student if appropriate, but also to refer them quickly to an individual close by who is familiar with the School and its programmes. Academic staff may choose either to refer a student directly to a student support officer, or to seek advice from the student support officer before advising the student further.

4.8 *Disability Support*

There is little advantage in requiring academic staff to act in this capacity and indeed in the majority of schools this is an administrative role. It includes:

- liaison between the School and the Disability Support Office;
- understanding and implementing needs of students with disabilities, acting in liaison with academic staff as necessary;
- providing/arranging support for academic staff, e.g. in photocopying notes, arranging for non-standard sizes, Braille printing etc;
- meeting with students to ensure their needs are catered for;
- access point for students not yet registered with DSO – referral for assessment.

Note: academic staff do have an essential role in determining, for example, alternative assessments and the delivery of the curriculum and therefore will be involved at various stages.

4.9 *Careers Advice*

Liaising with the careers service and coordinating/arranging talks, presentations and events is clearly an administrative role. Skills such as developing interview techniques and CV writing may be incorporated into personal development programmes/study skills programmes as described above, or alternatively offered as extra sessions in liaison with the careers service.

Student support officers may well develop the knowledge and expertise to give students basic advice on career options and routes related to their academic programmes, and should also be able to refer students appropriately to academic staff if, for example, they wish to discuss options for study at masters or PhD level.

Academic staff should be available to students to discuss in particular the possibilities, options and requirements for further academic study, or for specialist careers closely related to the discipline the student is studying.

4.10 *References*

Both students and employers are likely to expect academic staff to provide references. In some areas of the University this has become problematic as a result of the limited scope for academic staff to develop relationships with students sufficient to provide an adequate reference. There may be potential to ameliorate this issue through a more coordinated approach:

- basic references, such as those required for temporary employment, which simply seek confirmation of a student's status and presence in the University, can straightforwardly be produced by School administrative staff;
- it may be beneficial to implement a system whereby an academic reference is lodged in the student's file for use by anyone who is asked to supply a reference;
- reference letters may be prepared in the main by administrative staff and passed to academic colleagues for the insertion of specific comment and signature;
- references for students seeking to undertake PhD programmes or careers closely related to the discipline of study (e.g. industrial research in the chemical industry) should be produced either by academic staff or in very close consultation with them, with copies being kept on the central student file;
- keeping records of references given on the central student file will help to avoid duplication of effort and will be very helpful in circumstances in which either a former student is asking for a reference some years after graduating, or a reference is being sought from a member of academic staff who has since left the University.

Where references are produced in this way, it is important that the wording clearly indicates what is fact and what is opinion and whose opinion it is (i.e., supervisor, course director, personal tutor etc.).

4.11 *Placement/Study Abroad Support*

In many programmes there are opportunities for students to work or study away from the University, either in the UK or overseas. Placement/Study Abroad Coordinators do not need to be members of academic staff but will seek to work closely with academic staff, particularly in the creation of placement opportunities and to ensure the suitability of the proposed activity.

- coordinating placement/study abroad opportunities;
- advising students pre-departure;
- supporting whilst away, e.g. by regular email contact, or by developing on-line resources *via* the internet/WebCT etc;
- liaison with Study Abroad Unit.

4.12 *Summary*

The development and formalisation of the participation of appropriately trained non-academic staff in the delivery of personal support to students in Schools would not only provide Schools with greater scope to implement locally specific arrangements but would also have clear benefits for students. The University's ability to develop and deliver integrated, coherent and efficient support arrangements of high quality that can be easily accessed by students would be facilitated by this shift. With specific responsibilities assigned to a defined and small group of staff relative to all academic staff, the Office of Student Support and Services would be better able to provide support for colleagues working in Schools. The delivery of relevant professional training in an ongoing and focussed way would be far more achievable and it would be easier to promote and maintain effective networks of staff operating in similar areas of work.

This review has also flagged up a number of additional issues that while not fundamental to the delivery of personal support to students are significant factors in the area of student support more widely defined. This is not surprising given the broad approach adopted for the information gathering exercise conducted. Several of these issues are reported on specifically above and a number feature in the summary of recommendations below. It is acknowledged that some of these will require the completion of a not insubstantial piece of work if they are to be addressed fully.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Guiding principles: it is not possible to determine a single approach to the provision of support to students that will apply universally across all Schools. In the interests of consistency the following guiding principles for the provision of personal support to students in Schools should be adopted:

- all tasks must be properly assigned to ensure that students' needs are met (see Section 4 for a discussion of the allocation of a number of key tasks associated with the provision of support to students);
- the involvement of suitably trained non-academic staff in the delivery of support to students should be maximised;
- the involvement of academic staff in the delivery of personal support must be explicitly justified in terms of the value it adds compared to the loss of that staff member's contribution to teaching and research;
- local student support arrangements must be carefully thought out and regularly reviewed to ensure that they are properly co-ordinated and responsive to changing circumstances;
- arrangements must be student-focussed so that a student can access support and guidance at any point and reach the advice they need within a few steps;
- advice and guidance to students must be accurate, of high quality and consistent – regardless of where it comes from. The aim must be to ensure a consistently high quality experience for students.

5.2 There must be greater emphasis on the coherent and seamless delivery of personal support to students. The structures and processes to facilitate and encourage improved communication and more effective relationships between different administrative units and service providers need to be identified and developed not only so that it is clear to students exactly where they go for what but also so that the incidence of students being passed from office to office is reduced. Particular attention needs to be paid to the interface between Schools and the centrally based services in order to promote a greater understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities and to address issues of duplication or omission. Appropriate guidelines for the referral of students will be developed.

5.3 The professionalisation of the delivery of personal support to students must be promoted. This must include more explicit definition of the respective roles and responsibilities of academic and non-academic staff based on an underlying philosophy of partnership, with academic and non-academic staff working in ways that are complementary. These definitions must be formulated in such a way as to ensure that they are clearly understood by all staff and students. Of benefit in this regard would be the more consistent use of a standard set of job titles for administrative and support roles in Schools. The aim should be to make job titles as transparent as possible, in order to guide students.

- 5.4 Consideration is needed of the ways in which improved and more consistent use can be made of online resources and other technologies in the delivery of personal support to students both independently and to complement face-to-face interactions. In this regard particular attention should be paid to the development of the new portals for students and for staff and the opportunities that will be provided by the new student system.
- 5.5 Particular attention needs to be paid to the support arrangements for students on joint or combined programmes of study to ensure that the provision for them is equal to that of single honours students. Where such programmes involve more than one School, there needs to be an agreement as to how tasks are distributed between the Schools and the information about this needs to be communicated clearly to the students concerned. Feedback from students on these programmes should be prioritised in order that their needs are identified clearly and addressed systematically so that they can be properly integrated into the academic communities across which their studies extend.
- 5.6 A coherent systematic and ongoing programme of staff training and development specifically focussed on the delivery of personal support and guidance to students should be introduced. This will include streams of activity that will meet the training needs of generalist staff requiring a working overview of the key issues as well as the development needs of specialist staff seeking career enhancement in the area of student support and guidance. A commensurate change in the training delivered to new academic staff will also be required.
- 5.7 A programme of work is needed for the production and delivery of updated and enhanced information and guidance material better designed and targeted to meet the needs of staff working in the area of student support and guidance than is currently the case. This should include the issue of a Guide to Advising and Supporting Students, to replace the Guide to Personal Tutoring referred to in many Schools but not updated since 2001.
- 5.8 It would be advantageous to re-confirm the place of personal development planning, which should take place firmly in the academic context and should not be focused on non-academic matters. A re-statement of the University policy on personal development planning would be beneficial, with a view to finding creative ways of fulfilling the aims of PDP without reducing it to an exercise in form-filling and tick boxes.
- 5.9 Consideration is needed of the ways in which participation in peer-mentoring arrangements can be maximised, to build from an already proven base. To this end particular attention should be paid to the Manchester Leadership Programme and other existing schemes and the ways in which they might be utilised to facilitate such an extension.
- 5.10 The role and organisation of academic tutoring needs to be considered with a view to developing an institutional framework that establishes it as an institutional priority which is valued and supported and recognises its fundamental importance to the overall quality of the student experience.
- 5.11 There needs to be greater emphasis on the overall context for communication with, and dissemination of information to, students. Of particular concern is the coherence of the information provided to students, the timeliness of its delivery and the extent to which it provides effective signposting to key services, facilities and procedures. It will be important to ensure that these issues are addressed by the work currently being planned for the production of a strategy for communication with students.
- 5.12 It will be necessary to work with the central student support services to enhance the already good relationship they have with Schools and to ensure that best advantage is derived from the opportunities presented by the new SCAN building. Particular attention should be paid to the Academic Advisory Service and the ways in which it might be developed in order to better support staff working in the area of support and guidance, and to enhance the services provided to all students.

- 5.13 A greater awareness is needed of student diversity and its implications for the delivery of personal support and for teaching and learning in general. An institutional commitment to the delivery of diversity awareness training to all staff, academic and non-academic is needed. Schools must review their systems and procedures to assess their suitability and effectiveness in meeting the needs of a diverse population, and aim to implement systems which will provide a high quality and consistent experience for all students. Though it is not suggested that any group of student be singled out and provided with separate support, there may be some instances in which some such targeted support is necessary on a short-term basis.
- 5.14 Particular attention needs to be paid to arrangements for student induction (see Appendix 3) in order to achieve some overall coherence to the student experience and to establish some institutional standards according to which this important activity should be conducted.
- 5.15 Whatever system is adopted by individual Schools it is important that they are subjected to regular review against the guiding principles itemised (see Section 5.1), and that effective ways of collecting student feedback are devised. A lack of complaints about a system is rarely a signal that it's working. The task definition section (see Section 4) will help with reviewing systems by enabling Schools to gauge the requirement for academic involvement.

Appendices

1. Membership of Steering Group and Terms of Reference
2. The Student Support Strategic Plan (2005)
3. Induction
4. Training and development
5. a) Sample Audit Tool and b) Student Focus Group Questions

**The University of Manchester
Office of Student Support and Services**

Review of Personal Support for Students in Schools

Membership:

Kersti Börjars (<i>Chair</i>)	Associate Dean for Undergraduate Affairs, Faculty of Humanities
Sarah Beer	Student Experience Officer
Karen Charters	Student Support Officer, School of Arts, Histories and Cultures
Fang Cooke	
Gemma Currie	Students Union Welfare Officer
Jeremy Gregory	Director of Undergraduate Studies, School of Arts, Histories and Cultures
Clive Griffiths	University Adviser on Student Affairs
Liz Nolan	Undergraduate Manager, School of Languages, Linguistics and Cultures
Simon Perry	MSc Programme Director & Teaching and Learning Manager, School of Chemical Engineering and Analytical Science
Liz Sheader	Teaching Fellow, Faculty of Life Sciences, and Adviser, Academic Advisory Service
Paul Smith	Student Support Officer, School of Social Sciences
Pat Sponder	Head of Student Support and Services
Liz Theaker	Senior Tutor, School of Dentistry
Christopher Whitehead	Director of Teaching, School of Chemistry
Jenny Wragge	Student Experience Administrator

Terms of Reference:

To review the current support arrangements for students in Schools. This will primarily, but not exclusively, involve an audit of those arrangements and the systematic consideration of the full range of tasks associated with the support and guidance of students in Schools in order to ascertain how they are dealt with currently and by whom, and whether there are tasks that might be reassigned.

In carrying out this task, to give full consideration to the University imperatives as set out in *Manchester 2015* to improve the quality of the student experience and to achieve efficiencies in the use of staff time, including the reduction of the administrative burden on academic colleagues.

To understand the extent to which current arrangements are seamless and integrated across the University. In this regard particular account will be taken of the levels of awareness in Schools and Faculties of the range of services provided centrally, the interface between those services and Schools and Faculties and the process of referral.

To take account of the student view of current support arrangements through discussion with representatives of the Students' Union and a review of the results of the student satisfaction survey(s).

To review the current literature on personal support for students and to understand the arrangements that are currently in place at peer institutions both nationally and internationally.

To identify and disseminate good practice that exists both within the University and at peer institutions.

To produce a report and to make recommendations to the Vice-President and Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) about the future provision of personal support for all taught students, within an overall integrated framework for academic support and personal support.

October 2005

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

The Student Support Strategic Plan

1. Introduction

1.1 The experience of students is crucial not only to their own individual well-being, development and achievement but also to the reputation of the University and its ability to achieve the vision and goals set out in the University Strategic Plan: Towards Manchester 2015. This Student Support Strategic Plan supports a number of these goals (as set out below in bold type).

1.2 Student support and development are closely linked and it is important therefore that this strategic plan and that for teaching and learning are well co-ordinated and integrated to ensure greatest benefit for students. Successful delivery of support for students that is of the highest quality is critically dependent on the activities of Schools, Faculties, administrative Directorates and other service areas. This plan sets out the characteristics and strategies for the provision of student support and identifies the specific contribution to be made by the Office of Student Support and Services (OSSS).

2. Goal 2: World Class Research

To establish the University of Manchester by 2015 among the 25 strongest research universities in the world on commonly accepted criteria of research excellence and performance

In order to contribute to this Goal and to the following Key Performance Indicators

Progress towards a doubling of the number of postgraduate research students by 2015, and evidence of increasing levels of satisfaction among such students with their university experience, as measured by an independent annual survey.

The number of staff conducting research of national quality (returnable to RAE) rising to 90% and the number of staff conducting research of international quality to 30% by 2008

the University will:

2.1 Maximise the time available to academic staff by transferring the provision of personal support for students from academic staff to well-trained administrative and other support staff [*Dependencies on other strategies: Faculties and HR*]

2.2 Establish a reputation for the provision of an overall experience for postgraduate research students which is of the highest quality [*Dependencies on other strategies: Research*]

2.3 Establish a range of scholarships, bursaries and other financial schemes to attract and support excellent postgraduate students [*Dependencies on other strategies: Faculties, External Relations*]

2.4 Re-organise and develop residential accommodation so as to provide postgraduate research students with accommodation that is appropriate to their needs and those of their families [*Dependencies on other strategies: STARS*]

2.5 The OSSS will contribute specifically to achieving these strategic aims by:

- Taking the lead role, in association with the Graduate Education Group, in developing and undertaking annual surveys to measure satisfaction and to collect quantitative and qualitative data from postgraduate research students with the aim of identifying issues which are important to this student group and areas which need to be enhanced.

- Having identified the specific support needs of postgraduate research students, working with the Graduate Education Group and others across the University to contribute to meeting those needs and to support the recruitment and admission processes as appropriate
- Similarly, identifying specific issues in relation to postgraduate taught students (PGTs) so that they are well supported. Such support is important not only to helping them achieve their academic potential but also as a means of converting good PGTs into postgraduate research students
- Helping faculties and schools through provision of advice, guidance and other support as appropriate to establish and administer scholarship, bursary and other financial schemes to attract and support postgraduate research students
- Working with STARS to help develop accommodation strategies and residential support arrangements appropriate to the needs of postgraduate research students

3. Goal 4: Excellent Teaching and Learning

To provide students with support services, learning environments, teachers and teaching and learning infrastructure equal to the best in the world

A system of support for students that is of the highest quality will have the following characteristics:

- 3.1 The range and quality of support services will be appropriate to meet the diverse needs of the whole student community across the student life-cycle, from recruitment and admission, progressing through induction and the course of study, and on to academic success and employment, recognising and responding to the distinctive character of individual groups of students (such as postgraduates on professional or executive programmes of study, mature students with families). *[Dependencies on other strategies: most other strategies, particularly Faculties, Teaching and Learning, External Relations]*
- 3.2 Support for students will be provided at many points throughout the University, in schools, faculties, administrative directorates and specialist services, and will be delivered in a co-ordinated manner so as to provide coherent and integrated academic and personal support and guidance for students and will be provided by staff who are properly trained and supported for these roles. In order to maximise the time available for academic staff to undertake research and teaching, and to ensure that staff are properly trained and supported to carry out their responsibilities, separate but integrated arrangements will be provided in faculties and schools for the provision of academic support and personal support for students – the latter of which will be provided by administrative and other support staff. *[Dependencies on other strategies: most other strategies, particularly Faculties, Teaching and Learning, HR]*
- 3.3 Support services and facilities will be equally accessible to all students, responsive to their individual needs, pro-active and innovative in their delivery and development, and will evolve and adapt to changing social, legislative, educational and institutional needs. *[Dependencies on other strategies: most other strategies, particularly Faculties, Teaching and Learning, External Relations, HR]*

In addition, and in support of this, the University will:

- 3.4 Foster a student-centred approach and a positive relationship with students at all times with the aim of helping all students, as partners in learning, to develop and achieve their full potential and of making the overall student experience both rewarding and fulfilling. *[Dependencies on other strategies: most other strategies, particularly Faculties, Teaching and Learning]*
- 3.5 Recognise the importance of student support and value and appropriately reward the contribution of staff working in these capacities. Specifically, staff working in student support roles will be properly trained and supported to carry out their responsibilities and their career structure professionalized. As a consequence, the University will derive maximum benefit and staff with particular strengths in

this area of work will be able to fulfil their potential. [*Dependencies on other strategies: Faculties, HR*]

3.6 Expand and develop student-led initiatives and encourage all students to participate in personal development schemes, such as peer mentoring, peer-assisted study and in student volunteering and community activities [*Dependencies on other strategies: Faculties, Teaching and Learning, External Relations*]

3.7 Ensure that adequate resources are available to support these developments.

3.8 The OSSS will contribute specifically to meeting these strategic aims by

- Being a focus for encouraging the development and enhancement of processes and services across the University which collectively will provide an integrated and comprehensive network of high quality support throughout the student life-cycle
- Keeping abreast of developments nationally and internationally in the area of student support
- Keeping informed of, and giving advice on, changes and developments in the life of the city and region which have a bearing upon the quality of the students experience and raise issues for the provision of student support
- Ensuring that comprehensive information about student services and support arrangements is available through a variety of means to students, staff, prospective students and their families.
- Engaging with schools, faculties, directorates and the student body, and developing effective networks across the University of staff with a particular student support role with a view to providing support and advice, ensuring consistency of treatment and identifying and sharing good practice
- Contributing to the proper functioning of the University and the fair and consistent treatment of students through the development of a comprehensive set of exemplary student-related policies and procedures and the monitoring of their operation across the University
- Working collaboratively with colleagues to improve the provision of personal and welfare support arrangements for students in schools and faculties
- Working collaboratively with the Head of the Accommodation Office, the Senior Wardens and Wardens to ensure that student support in residences is effective and well managed
- Working with staff in schools and faculties, Staff Development, and other services to provide information, advice and training to staff who are supporting students
- Being a point of well-informed and professional advice, reference and referral
- Ensuring the efficient and effective delivery of disability, counselling, academic and other advisory, administrative and financial services to students that meet the aspirations of the University, and developing mechanisms for benchmarking and evaluating these services
- Ensuring that arrangements are in place for undertaking student satisfaction surveys, including arrangements for analysing results and taking appropriate follow-up action, and liaising with schools, faculties and other providers of student services on associated means of assessing student satisfaction and obtaining students' comments on services and facilities
- Preparing annual reports on the operation of appeals, complaints and discipline procedures, giving information on the number and nature of cases and identifying general issues raised by students through these processes
- Ensuring appropriate mechanisms are in place to monitor the quality and effectiveness of provision.

4. Goal 5: Widening Participation

To make the University of Manchester the UK's most accessible research-intensive university by providing international students from educationally deprived backgrounds and home students from traditionally under-represented sections of society with a supportive learning environment in an inclusive and welcoming University community

The aim of the University must be to have in place a system of support of the highest quality which can accommodate and respond sensitively to the particular needs of students, thereby benefiting all categories and groups of students regardless of their individual background. Such a system will include elements of targeted support and, with regard to students from non-traditional backgrounds, the University will

4.1 Facilitate recruitment and retention of students from non-traditional backgrounds by the provision of targeted support services and facilities, including:

- Excellent induction arrangements
- Access to appropriate services which support the specific needs of these groups of students
- Provision of mentoring and student-led support schemes
- Provision of a register of work opportunities to assist students having to undertake part-time working
- Provision of a range of residential accommodation

[Dependencies on other strategies: all Faculties, External Relations, STARS]

4.2 The OSSS will contribute specifically to these strategic aims by:

- Working with colleagues in Recruitment and Widening Participation and with groups of students to understand better the support needs of students from non-traditional backgrounds, including mature students, and issues affecting their progress and retention
- Contributing to the development of flexible and responsive support programmes, including those designed to support the social integration of students living at home into the student community and their academic environment
- Helping to establish and administer scholarship and bursary schemes to support students from non-traditional backgrounds, including international students, ensuring that these schemes are targeted effectively and operated properly and fairly
- Providing clear comprehensive information and advice about support arrangements and opportunities for students and prospective students

5. Goal 7: Efficient, Effective Management

To maintain management systems, processes and services at all levels of the University that are responsive to academic needs, strategically focused and exemplary in meeting all internal and external obligations and responsibilities, and to provide all staff with a safe, satisfying working environment offering rewarding opportunities for professional development

5.1 The OSSS is committed

- to being responsive, constructive and helpful;
- to providing the highest levels of service to all stakeholders;
- to continuously improving processes and practices;
- to reducing bureaucracy;
- to creating and nurturing a sophisticated student-centred approach within the University, combining a professional response to students as customers with an expectation of them as partners in the creation of a high quality academic community; and
- to developing mechanisms for benchmarking, monitoring and evaluating its services and facilities.

6 Goal 8: Internationally Competitive Resources

To ensure that the University has the recurrent and capital resources required to be competitive at the highest international level

6.1 The goal of increasing the unit-of-resource funding by expanding taught masters programmes and on fees from home students **(8.2)**, and increasing the number of international student enrolments **(8.3)** will be actively supported by enhanced services and facilities to meet the increased

expectations and aspirations of these students. *[Dependencies on other strategies: all Faculties, External Relations, Research, Teaching & Learning]*

6.2 The OSSS will contribute to this by

- Working with others, principally the Graduate Education Group, to identify and help meet the needs of taught graduate students
- Keeping aware of the diverse needs of, and developments affecting, international students, and ensuring that appropriate arrangements are available to support their specific needs
- Providing advice and information about national and international changes and developments that may affect the welfare and well-being of international students
- Engaging actively with Curriculum Development and Innovation, Business, Careers and Community Division, the Students' Union, the International Society, and others to promote and help develop "host", "buddy" and mentoring schemes to help international students integrate academically and socially
- Working with the Equality and Diversity unit and others to ensure that staff supporting students have good cultural awareness

7 Goal 9: More Effective Community Service

To contribute to the social, cultural and economic development of North West England, and in a broader national and international context to the development of a secure, humane, prosperous and sustainable future for human society

The University will support this goal by

7.1 Encouraging student involvement in community service *[Dependencies on other strategies: External Relations]*

7.2 The OSSS will contribute by

- Engaging actively with the Business, Careers and Community Division, the Students' Union, and Resident Associations

December 2004

Office of Student Support and Services
Review of Support for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Students in Schools

Student Induction

Induction is a key process which underpins the whole student experience. It serves to help students to settle into the University generally, and their Schools specifically, and to start to engage effectively with their studies. When successful there are clear benefits for both the individual students and for the University as a whole. However a poor induction can have implications later for the academic performance of students, student retention and for student support services both locally and centrally. As a consequence, greater institutional emphasis on this important activity is required. Currently, there is no agreed framework for, or guidance about, student induction other than a short section in the Manual of Academic Practice (MAP). There are no mechanisms for drawing together the expertise in this area that already exists and ensuring that the very best practice is identified and disseminated in a coherent and systematic way. It is acknowledged that Schools should be the primary locus for induction, since they are the unit with which the student most closely identifies, and with which they will have their 'university' relationship. Nevertheless, the quality of the student experience will be enhanced by the development of an institutional framework, and accompanying guidance, that: -

- reflects the significance of this activity within the overall process of transition;
- takes appropriate account of QAA guidance in the area and feedback from students;
- promotes the need for consistency and coherence;
- recognises that induction is an ongoing process not just confined to Freshers' Week;
- ensures that Schools are properly supported in this area of activity.

In the meantime, particular attention should be paid to the following:

Promotion of key staff, administrative as well as academic - administrative staff responsible for dealing with students should have a substantial profile in the induction programme so that students are introduced to them, understand their roles and the ways in which they are available to help them. By promoting them in this way it should be easier for students to approach them later.

Promote integration and foster a sense of community - Schools should seek to take full advantage of the opportunities their new constitution within the single university provides for the delivery of programmes of induction. There is scope to adopt an approach that recognises the generic and the specific elements of induction and facilitates the development of a School 'community' with students from different programmes/discipline areas within a School being brought together for the common elements of their induction programme. In some Schools, for example, PGT students participate with PGR students. This is valuable from the point of view of students being able to develop networks and access skills training, as well as providing an opportunity for Schools to nurture PGT students who may wish to pursue PGR programmes.

Students should be regarded as a key part of the School's community. Initiatives which endeavour to engage them with the School's research and the link between research and teaching, e.g. by involving academic staff in introducing students to the world of academia outside their programme of study, will lead to an increased sense of ownership of the School by the student. It will also address the problem that many students do not understand what academic staff do for the 'rest of the time', which leads to frustration and dissatisfaction from students who expect their lecturers and tutors to be continually available.

Peer support - existing students are an important resource who can play a valuable, active role in the induction of new students. It is particularly useful to ensure that peer mentors and student representatives play a prominent part during Freshers' Week and are well integrated thereafter into the support arrangements in the School.

Prepare students for the UK HE learning environment - all induction programmes currently in existence include sessions which introduce students to their programme of study. It would be beneficial to ensure that these directly address the expectations the University has of students in terms of their participation in lectures/seminars/tutorials, the difference between University and School, the role of the lecturer/tutor, the expectation that the student will develop a pattern of independent learning, the need for the student actively to contribute etc.

Ongoing Induction - induction should not be restricted to a series of events delivered solely during Freshers' Week. Schools need to refocus on induction as an ongoing process that extends throughout the academic programme and will involve systematic intervention at key points such as start of semester 2 and at the start of each subsequent academic year. In particular attention should be paid to arrangements for students starting their studies at times other than September / October and students returning to study after a period of interruption.

Feedback and Review - programmes of induction need to be reviewed regularly and systematically to ensure that they remain appropriate and fit for purpose. It may be beneficial to include induction arrangements in the annual quality review process.

**Office of Student Support and Services
Review of Support for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Students in Schools**

Staff training and development, networks

The focus of written support materials will be reviewed and the 'Guide to Personal Tutoring' will be re-written in accordance with the recommendations of this report; giving particular emphasis to the role of non-academic staff in student support and the requirement of academic staff to provide academic support to students. It will be necessary to produce a body of information and guidance written from the perspective of staff rather than relying, as is the current tendency, on information given to students. In recognition of the important interrelationship between academic and personal support this report seeks to promote arrangements that will improve the quality of the resources available to support academic staff in their relationship with students as well as the nature of the service for students themselves. Academic staff should not feel discouraged from discussing personal support issues if approached by students, but there should be no expectation that this is an assumed part of their role. Furthermore, training should focus on clarifying the boundaries of their role and ensuring their awareness of the responsibilities of colleagues locally and the specialist services available centrally.

A coherent and systematic programme of staff training and development will be necessary to support staff undertaking a specialist student support role in a School. There will, however, have to be sufficient flexibility in the provision to ensure that the needs of staff operating at a variety of different points in the system can be met e.g., dedicated support staff seeking to develop a career in student support and guidance, staff requiring only an overview of the broad issues or academic staff acting in a capacity such as a programme director or senior tutor

The Office of Student Support and Services (OSSS) is currently working with colleagues in Curriculum Innovation to reconfigure and re-launch the Certificate course in student support. It is planned that this course will be offered at 'basic' and 'advanced' levels.

An increase in the number of designated professional student support officers in schools will facilitate the creation of networks. These networks will be facilitated and supported by the OSSS, which will also take responsibility for ensuring that appropriate training programmes are available. This recognises the OSSS' professional and specialist role in advising on student support matters. It is envisaged that the OSSS will have a central coordinating role in relation to non-academic student support throughout the University, and will work closely with Faculties and Schools to respond to their needs and deliver appropriate support and training.

The University of Manchester
Office of Student Support and Services
Review of personal support for students in Schools

Please provide the following information for your School

Name of School: _____

Name and position of person completing the form: _____

Date form completed: _____

Section 1: Communication and information

Please give details of:

1.1 The arrangements that you have for communicating with new students before they arrive at the University

1.2 The information that you provide to new students before they arrive at the University

1.3 The arrangements that you have for communicating with, and disseminating information to, registered students

Section 2: Induction and orientation

2.1 Please give details of the induction arrangements and the ways in your school that new students are introduced to, and informed of, the following:

Their programme of study	
Personal development planning	
Student representation	
Learning support	
Peer mentoring	
Library facilities and services	
IT services and facilities (including on-line learning)	
Campus orientation	
Health and safety	

Welfare provision and arrangements	
Structure and organisation of the School (including key contacts)	
School administrative arrangements and procedures	
Timetabling information	
Plagiarism	

2.2 Please describe the induction arrangements that your School has for taught postgraduates where they vary from those described above.

2.3 Please describe the induction arrangements that your School has for returning students

Section 3: Personal support and guidance

3.1 Please describe the arrangements you have in your School for the delivery of personal support and guidance to students

3.2 Please describe the role of administrative or support staff in these arrangements

3.3 How is personal tutoring organised in your School?

3.4 Are all academic staff in your School involved in delivering personal tutoring? How many academic staff are involved in delivering personal tutoring to (a) undergraduates (b) taught post graduates?

3.5 How many tutees on average do those staff involved in personal tutoring each have?

3.6 What are the key responsibilities of personal tutors in your School?

3.7 What training do staff receive to carry out this role?

3.8 How are training needs identified?

3.9 Who co-ordinates / manages the personal tutoring arrangements i.e., allocates tutees to tutors?

3.10 How is the effectiveness of the arrangements monitored and feedback on the arrangements gathered from students and from staff?

3.11 How are possible improvements or changes to the arrangements identified and implemented?

3.12 How is the performance of individual staff in this role monitored?

Please supply any material prepared in the School to explain and or support staff / students in their respective roles and responsibilities with regard to personal tutoring.

Section 4: Assignment of tasks

Listed below are a range of tasks that need to be done in Schools. In order to assist our thinking about possible future models for the delivery of personal support to students it would be helpful if you could indicate **(a)** whether the task is currently undertaken by an academic colleague and **(b)** whether you consider the task could be re-assigned to other staff.

Task	Currently responsible	Might be re-assigned		Comments (please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)
		Yes	No	
Responsibility for induction arrangements		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Monitoring work & attendance of students		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Discussing exam results / academic progress		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writing references for students		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Developing students' study skills		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Discussing with individual students their Personal Development Planning		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Discussing with individual students their choice of optional units		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Helping individual students with disabilities to obtain support		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Discussing with students their intended career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
First point of contact for students on welfare / personal support matters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Advises (or refers) students in need of specialist support / guidance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Liaison with central or external services about students in difficulties (See also Section 5 below)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Acts as an advocate for students in difficulties within the School	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Section 5: Student diversity

Please indicate whether, and if so the nature of, any particular arrangements made in your School to meet the specific needs of the following groups of students:

	No	Yes	If yes, please give brief details here and / or append copies of any materials that describe the arrangements that you have.
Students from overseas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Students with a disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Students who live at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Students with children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Mature students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Part time students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Students completing a compulsory part of their programme away from the University e.g., on a placement, on a period abroad etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Distance learning students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Students on joint or combined programmes of study	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

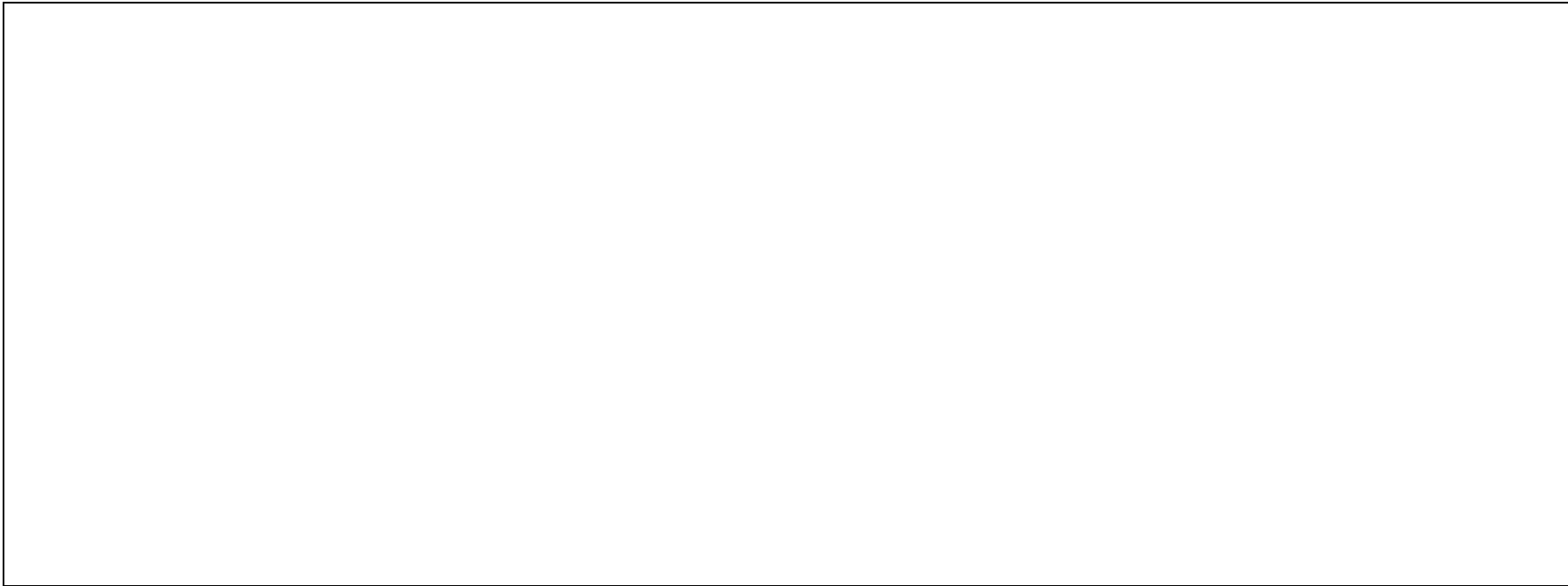
How are issues of equality and diversity dealt with in your School?

Section 6: People in your School it would be useful for us to contact

Please give the name and contact details of any staff in your School who you think it would be useful for us to contact about the work of this project.

Section 7: Other comments

Please add any comments here that you may have about the delivery of personal support to students e.g., are there any examples of good practice at other institutions that you think we should explore, are there any initiatives that you would like to see implemented centrally?



Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Sarah Beer and Jenny Wragge
Student Experience Office

Questions used in Student Focus Group

The discussion will focus on aspects of student support delivered in Schools.

Induction Arrangements

When you began your programme of study:-

Which members of staff did you meet during your first week?

Did you meet the Head of School?

Did you meet your Programme Director (or similar)?

Did you meet your personal tutor? (Do you have a personal tutor?)

Did you meet any administrative staff? (Which? What were they doing? – e.g. just in the office, making themselves known in a lecture, delivering a presentation, serving refreshments?)

Are there other members of staff who you would have liked to have met but didn't?

What information did you get during the induction process?

Was this the right information?

Was there too much or too little?

Can you remember any of it now?

Did you meet any students from other years of study?

Peer Mentors

Buddies

Student reps

Just other students

What opportunities to meet other students from your programme of study/school did you get?

Do you think you got enough opportunity to meet other students, either from your own year or from other years?

Did you find it useful to meet them?

Do you have a personal tutor? How often do you see them? Why do you see them

Attendance

What do you do if you want/need to miss compulsory classes?

What sort of things do you think you would be allowed to miss them for?

If you stop turning up for compulsory classes, what happens?

Exam Results/Progress/Options

How do you get your exam results?

How do you prefer to get your exam results?

If you get them in person, who gives them to you?

Is this the right person? Why do you think it is this person?

Have you ever done less well than you expected?

Did you want to talk to somebody about that? If so, who did you talk to? Why did you choose that person?

What would you do if you were struggling with your course? Or wanted to change your course, give up your degree? (Has that ever happened to you; how did you get through it?)

If there's part of your coursework – e.g. an assignment, part of a lecture, a problem or exercise – that you don't understand, what do you do?

How do you decide which course units you are going to take each year? (If you have any choice).

Study Skills and Personal Development Planning

What do you understand by the term 'study skills'? Do you feel you need to be explicitly taught these as part of your course? How and by whom should they be taught?

Do you understand what is meant by transferable skills? How have you been made aware of transferable skills? How do you think this should be done?

Have you heard of personal development planning? (It may be called pdp, or padp, or papdp – personal and professional development planning).

What system does your School/programme have for doing pdp?

Do you think pdp is useful?

Do you have anyone who you can discuss your personal development and academic progress with? Have you discussed it?

Personal problems

If you had a personal problem who would you expect to be able to help you?

What kind of things would you discuss? Why?

Here are some common problems – what would you do about them?

Your neighbours in your hall of residence are making a lot of noise.

You know your next fee payment is due soon, but you haven't got enough money in your bank account?

A member of your family is seriously ill and you need to go home for a few weeks.

You've been throwing up all night and you've got an exam at 9am.

Your boyfriend/girlfriend has just dumped you.

You feel anxious and unable to concentrate on your work; the worry is making it all worse and you're frightened you're going to fail.

You've got a part-time job which is really vital in keeping you afloat financially but it clashes with one of your lectures.

You've had a heavy cold and been in bed for a couple of days. You've missed a couple of lectures and a seminar.

Peer Mentoring

Does your School have a peer mentoring scheme? Have you taken part in it? Was it useful? Why was it good/why didn't you bother with it?

After your degree

How many people know what they want to do after they graduate?

How did you decide on that – did you get any advice from anywhere? Where?

Who is going to be your referee when you start applying for jobs/places on masters/phd programmes?