

Faculty of Humanities

Personalised Learning

Core Principles underpinning the *Manchester Experience*

Consultation and document history

The development of this document has been overseen by the Undergraduate Review Strategy Group (URSG) whose membership comprises:

- Professor Colin Stirling, Vice-President (Teaching and Learning) (Chair)
- Professor Tony Brown, Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences
- Dr Chris Davies, Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), Faculty of Humanities
- Professor Kevin O'Brien, Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences
- Professor Richard Reece, Associate Dean (Undergraduate), Faculty of Life Sciences
- Professor Alistair Ulph, Vice-President and Dean, Faculty of Humanities
- Prof Paul O'Neill, Head of the Manchester Medical School
- Dr Arthur Garforth, School of Chemical Engineering and Analytical Science
- Rob Pinfold, General Secretary, UMSU
- Chris Jenkinson, Academic Affairs Officer, UMSU
- Louise Walmsley, Head of the Teaching and Learning Support Office (Secretary)

An initial draft of the document was considered by the URSG on 28 May 2008. A revised draft was circulated to the Group on 11 June 2008 and the Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) undertook an initial consultation within their Faculties. Comments from this initial consultation informed the version of the document which was considered by Senate on 25 June 2008. The discussions at Senate and then at Heads of School meetings on 1 July resulted in the further development of the document and a revised version was circulated to the URSG and Heads of School on 7 July before consideration at Senate. This version of the document incorporates the comments received in response and is presented to Senate for discussion and approval.

Executive Summary from the Report of Task Force 5: Personalised Learning

The University of Manchester is well-placed to deliver personalised learning across the student experience but will need to strike a balance between curriculum choice and excellent small group teaching. Excellent advising from academic staff, expert support staff and peers should be a normal and expected part of the student experience but significant work is required to ensure that this goal is achieved, including provision of new resources and facilities for student learning, staff training, and monitoring of advising at discipline area level. A commitment to an educational philosophy and ethos that emphasises personalised learning is key to enhancing the University of Manchester's reputation and status amongst leading international HEIs. This philosophy should be supported by a teaching and learning strategy and effective, well-planned administrative structures to deliver the strategy.

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to define a set of principles that will form the basis of the University's approach to personalised learning. The ethos is to promote a culture in which respect for learners is paramount and where students are actively encouraged to develop constructive academic relationships with individual teachers, together with a sense of identity within a cohort of learners. Students will be further encouraged to take ownership of their learning-experience and to develop the constellation of skills associated with a Manchester Graduate as defined in the *Purposes of a Manchester Education*. The combined effect is intended to stimulate a learning culture that enables students to achieve their full potential and whose graduates will be highly competitive in the knowledge economy.

If these principles are endorsed by Senate then it will become a matter for Faculties/Schools to develop detailed implementation plans designed to put them into practice. The Teaching and Learning Support Office, with the guidance of the Undergraduate Review Strategy Group, will liaise with Faculties/Schools to refine institutional policies and procedures and will facilitate any institutional level assistance that might be required. The intention being to make significant progress on implementation during the 08/09 session.

The Faculty of Humanities has enhanced this document to provide further guidance and interpretation for Schools implementing the principles of personalised learning. Faculty notes have been highlighted in the boxes embedded within the document.

Principles

1. Student Choice:

- i. All students should be afforded opportunities to choose optional units in order to pursue their individual academic interests whilst maintaining the fundamental objectives of their degree as recognised by the *Purposes of a Manchester Education* and, where appropriate, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

Whilst student choice is important, the Faculty of Humanities recognises that in order to deliver aspects of the personalised learning agenda, the extent of choice may be reduced within disciplines in order that staff input time can be redistributed to facilitate small group teaching. However, within the wider context of Humanities degree programmes, student choice should be widened by ensuring that there is space within programme structures to allow for choice from *outside* of the discipline, broadening the students' educational learning and experience in line with the Purposes of a Manchester Undergraduate Education. Student choice may also incorporate the opportunities that students have for different study routes within their programme structures.

- ii. All students should have access to suitable technologies and educational resources that allow flexible delivery of appropriate components of the curriculum at a time and a place of their choosing.
- iii. Programmes should be designed to offer a range of pedagogical styles across the student academic experience.

2. Scale and Support:

- i. All students should have the opportunity for significant interaction with teachers on an individual or small group basis.

Significant interaction with teachers on an individual or small group basis can occur in a number of ways, not necessarily just within individual units but at programme level, or for a combination of units in a linked way. Indeed, some level of small group interaction that encourages and promotes cross-unit reflection should be encouraged. Such interaction must be of pedagogical benefit to the student and their learning experience and contextualised within their programme of study. This may require Schools to review their programme structures to ensure that such opportunities are created and that there is sufficient staff resource to implement this principle. Alternative approaches to the use of face-to-face group teaching should be considered. Online small group work appropriately managed and facilitated can provide for significant teacher-student and student-student interaction.

Personal Tutor v.s Academic Adviser

A Personal Tutor traditionally provides pastoral support to tutees as well as academic support. Academic advising is therefore one of the roles of a Personal Tutor. Some Schools now provide the pastoral support through dedicated and trained administrators, leaving academic staff to fulfil the Academic Adviser role set out in 2.ii below. Schools must ensure that appropriate pastoral support continues to be provided to students. Where the title of a Personal Tutor is changed to Academic Adviser, it must be made clear to students where pastoral support is provided.

- ii. All students will have an *Academic Adviser* whose role will include:
 - a. Providing information and guidance on academic choice
 - b. Assisting students with the planning of short-term and long-term targets for development
 - c. Proactively monitoring both academic performance and student engagement and advising on constructive strategies for improvement as necessary

- d. Helping students both to identify the skills being acquired and to recognise progress towards fulfilment of the *Purposes of a Manchester Education*
- e. Encouraging students to productively reflect on their academic development; for example, through the use of a *personal portfolio* or *personal development plan*
- f. Working with students to build personal academic relationships
- g. Making weekly contact with students using an appropriate combination of face-to-face meetings, e-mail, on-line communications, etc., in order to address one or more of the above (a-f) on a regular and developing basis

The Faculty of Humanities recognises that there is a team of academic and support staff in Schools to provide academic and pastoral support to students and that this should continue. The *Academic Adviser* should be recognised as a member of that team. Schools should implement a mechanism for overseeing and monitoring the Academic Adviser role.

- h. Ensuring insofar as is possible that any student facing academic and/or personal difficulties does not lose contact with academic teachers or tutors or become isolated from student support staff and facilities.

All students must be made aware of their Academic Adviser contact details *and* of the wider personalised academic and pastoral support team in their programme handbooks, providing clarity on each person's role within that team, clearly identifying the key Adviser contact.

Where Academic Advisers make themselves available to students through Office Hours, the Academic Adviser has a responsibility to ensure they are available during those times at the location stated. Any changes to this must be notified to the students in advance.

Academic Advisement must be a partnership in which

- it is the responsibility of the Adviser to be proactive in communicating with their students and to escalate such efforts as required
- it is the responsibility of students to engage with their *Academic Adviser* in order to realise the intended benefits

- iii. All students should have access to some form of peer-support during their studies.

3. Interactivity and Self-expression

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

A personalised learning experience for students is not just about ensuring that students experience some of their studies in small groups but is also about the way in which teaching is delivered to students (face to face and online). Students should be able to have the opportunity to interact with staff and fellow students in larger group settings as well as small groups.

The role of Academic Adviser

The implementation of *Academic Advisers* may vary according to specific local needs and so the following are intended to inform the development of specific implementation strategies that adhere to the principles set out earlier.

1. All students be assigned an *Academic Adviser* at the beginning of their period of study.
2. A student would normally retain the same *Academic Adviser* throughout their studies but it should be recognised that some flexibility might be beneficial or indeed necessary. For example, there might be positive benefits to changing Advisers as a student progresses through certain Programmes. However, in order to establish a meaningful relationship between Adviser and advisee, it would seem appropriate that *Academic Advisers* would be assigned for a minimum of one academic year.

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

3. Schools should consider having a senior member of staff acting as a 'Senior Academic Adviser' who would act as a point of reference to academic Advisers in specific Programmes or Discipline Areas, would disseminate good practice, liaise with other academic Advisers on implementation and policy, and would oversee any relevant quality assurance issues.
4. Some schools employ Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) to enhance the provision of small group teaching. These teachers represent a valuable resource that might contribute to the process of academic advisement.

It is accepted that specific training is needed for GTAs to support this provision, and that not all GTAs can support all aspects of teaching. Mechanisms are needed to match specific GTA skill-sets with differing teaching roles and support. The needs of the GTA (training, career enhancement etc) must be taken into account to maximise the commitment to the teaching process of the GTA. It is recognised that to the student body a GTA is perceived as a teacher and must therefore be fully supported in that role.

5. The role of *Academic Adviser* should not be considered exclusive but might normally be expected to overlap with any of several existing roles; for example, where appropriate, an *Academic Adviser* might also act as an *Academic Tutor* for a given set of students.

The Faculty of Humanities interprets an *Academic Tutor* to be the person delivering a unit to students, i.e. Unit Tutor, Unit Leader, Unit Co-ordinator.

6. *Academic Advisers* would be encouraged to make use of the communication tools available in the Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment.
 - For example, an appropriate group-space could be created that would allow an *Academic Adviser* to 'meet' with their students on-line, either synchronously (at predetermined 'surgeries') or asynchronously via a bulletin-board. The built-in communication tools readily permit confidential one-to-one dialogue or group-based discussions between all registered members of the group. This would be an excellent vehicle with which to make regular contact with students. It would offer the further advantage of automatically tracking student engagement with the contributions of individual members being easily isolated and tracked by either time/date or content.
7. Faculty/School administration might be expected to support the role of *Academic Adviser* by providing relevant information in a timely fashion (e.g. attendance/performance monitoring).
8. The *Academic Adviser* system would be subject to annual monitoring (including input from student feedback) in order to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

Document Control

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Lead Contact:	Emma Rose