

Teaching Assistant Handbook



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1 The important contribution of Teaching Assistants

The Faculty of Humanities aims to ensure that all students receive high quality teaching in line with goal 2 of the Manchester 2020 vision – Outstanding Learning and Student Experience. Our commitment to students is set out in the Student Charter published in 2012 (please see Appendix 7). The University of Manchester employs around 1500 Teaching Assistants and demonstrators who deliver work across the various Schools and Faculties. This enables us to better support University of Manchester students particularly in large courses and also provides an opportunity for early career academics to gain teaching and work experience in support of a future career in higher education or elsewhere. Regardless of whether they are current PhD students, early career academics or externals, in their capacity as TA's they are members of University staff.

The, system of employing Teaching Assistants (TAs) to assist with teaching is an essential part of most undergraduate, and some postgraduate, courses. The crucial nature of this work in delivering an excellent student experience means that it needs to be taken seriously and that those who perform it must fully understand their role and duties.

The University recognises the need to train and support TAs to be effective in their role and has agreed core conditions of service that apply across the university. The online training course provided by the Faculty of Humanities in conjunction with the Staff Training and Development Unit (STDU) provides an introduction to and overview of important skills and knowledge relevant to the role. It is amplified and extended in Schools and discipline areas/divisions with more extensive initial and advanced training. Faculty of Humanities TA Training is mapped to the UK professional standards framework (UKPSF) and full completion of this training can lead to recognition as an Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (please see appendix 2 for details).

2 Roles and skills of a Teaching Assistant (UKPSF A1-5)

The role of TA can encompass instructing, teaching, assisting and assessing undergraduate students. TAs may therefore be called upon to:

- Conduct seminars and/or tutorials
- Supervise group work
- Mark formative and summative assessments
- Give written and verbal feedback
- Assist with field-trips or visits
- conduct examples classes
- Assist in the development of students' computational skills;
- Supervise groups of students to ensure that equipment is not misused or experiments conducted in a dangerous manner;

The way in which teaching is delivered influences how a student learns and their current and future academic performance. It is very important therefore for each TA to have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities and the parameters within which they are to work. In case of any uncertainty clarification of roles, responsibilities and tasks should be

sought.

The skills and knowledge required to effectively deliver the demands of TA work include:

- Personal organisation and time management (PSF K1)
- Sound language skills
- Good interpersonal skills
- Developed IT skills and ability to use e-learning packages such as blackboard (PSF K4)
- Knowledge of teaching and learning theory and session design (PSF K2)
- Disciplinary knowledge and understanding of appropriate teaching and learning approaches within the discipline (PSF K1)

Each of these skill knowledge areas will be developed in practice however the University offers a number of training courses that can enhance your skills and support you in your work as a TA. Some will be provided or organised by your School or Faculty and some will be available centrally. Below are the links to information on training and support for GTAs:

Staff Training and Development Unit:

<http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/employment/training/>

Humanities TA Training Hub

<http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/humnet/our-services/teaching-and-learning/tahub/training/>

3 Elements of the Training

The Humanities TA training programme has several elements most of which need to be undertaken *before* teaching starts. Training will begin after recruitment to the Humanities TA training pool, usually in April or May. Actual teaching will not be allocated until September and unfortunately teaching work cannot be guaranteed until then, but it is important to complete the training elements in advance of this so that you are ready to teach should you be allocated teaching work. You will not have to repeat this training should you be allocated teaching work in future years. The elements are as follows:

Shortly after recruitment to the TA pool you will be required to attend 1 hour webinar which will provide an introduction to the TA training programme and the requirements for HEA associate fellowship recognition.

You will be given access to a Blackboard course and expected to complete 6 hours of online modules of online training before you can begin teaching.

In September/October once you are allocated teaching you will be expected to attend a 2 hour training session at STDU which will be a chance to meet other TA's and discuss issues arising from online training. The focus will be on networking and supporting each other. This

completes the faculty level component of the training.

In the next few weeks you will also undertake 12+ hours of school/DA level training which will be a mixture of sessions covering topics in more depth or providing school specific content, as well as be discussion sessions or peer to peer mentoring and so on.

During your first year of teaching you will receive 3+ hours of 'supported teaching'. This will mean some observation by the course leader, TA coordinator or your supervisor but may also include peer observations or even teaching on which the you write a reflection for discussion with supervisor/TA coordinator/peers

HEA associate fellowship recognition requires 24 hours of training. So to summarise, the Humanities TA training programme provides this in the following ways:

1 hours – webinar (faculty)

6 hours + = online training (faculty)

2 hour face to face networking workshop (faculty)

3+ hours – supported teaching practice (School/DA)

12 hours – other learning support including e-learning. (School/DA/Elearning team)

4 Types of Classes

The following is a summary of the main types of class that TAs are asked to lead in the Faculty of Humanities. More Information on how to prepare for these classes can be found in the 'Preparing for Teaching' unit of the online training module. In all cases you should discuss with the course leader what is expected of you as a TA.

Seminars and Small Groups

Seminars (which may be called tutorials in some areas) have a variety of uses. Some sessions may require a direct, prepared input from the TA. Others will require the TA to draw out information and attitudes from the students. In some areas the seminar is used primarily to improve the student's personal skills - speaking, presentation, etc - whereas in others the main objective is to extend the subject knowledge.

Generally a characteristic of seminars, tutorials and small group sessions is that they are interactive and therefore require student input. Many students for a variety of reasons find presenting or speaking in front of others intimidating and difficult and for these students learning does not take place as it should. It is important therefore that not only are the objectives of such sessions clearly defined and communicated to the students so they understand what is expected but that they are helped to become more confident in such situations.

Seminars can be a stimulating environment where students can learn by discovery and from other students. Here the seminar leader can convey knowledge and skills, using example and feedback to promote understanding through discussion and exchange of ideas. One of the ways in which seminars can operate is for the TA (or the Lecturer) to get a small group, or an individual, to make an initial presentation on a set topic as a basis for further discussion. This

requires careful preparation and monitoring to ensure that all students take an equal part.

If the TA is to lead the discussion in a seminar or tutorial then there are a number of ways in which he or she can involve the students. Buzz Groups are useful to promote discussion in small sub-groups: divide the class into groups of two or three and give them a brief period in which to discuss a problem or to review the discussion so far. This can be made into a Snowball by getting each pair or trio to then discuss its views with another group and then each four or five with another larger group and so on. Using techniques such as buzz groups or snowballs can also help overcome some of the difficulties of having very reticent and very articulate students in the same group; simply put the quietest students together and the most articulate together but ensure that the snowball does not then mix the quietest group with the most outspoken one! Silence can be a powerful tool - but not if there happens to be one person who likes to monopolise the group. If you do not get an instant response to a question do not be afraid to wait awhile before prompting for an answer.

Examples Classes

The examples class is normally organised so that a TA has charge of a small (well, smaller than a full lecture class!) group of students and works through specific examples with them. The content should be set down by the Lecturer in charge to ensure consistency across the tutorial groups. Often the content is mathematical in nature but there are other types of examples class eg: management students may work through particular psychological tests.

As already mentioned, the keynote is *preparation*. It is important that the TA finds out well in advance what needs to be covered during the class and ensures that he or she is capable of working through the examples and also understands the underlying theory. The style of class will vary from subject to subject: some may require the TA to demonstrate the workings of one example or more before setting the group to work on additional ones; in others the Lecturers may assume that they have covered the method in sufficient depth in their lectures to enable the students to start on set questions. Another approach may be for the Lecturer to hand out questions after a lecture and expect the examples class to be used to pick up problems in handling the questions. Whatever the method, not only must the TA be clear what approach is to be taken, but it is vital that he or she has copies of all the relevant handouts from the Lecturer and read them in advance. (It's surprising how many times a simple typing error can throw out a calculation!).

Students may work on these examples singly or in groups. It should **not** be regarded as *cheating* for students to help one another, although there may be specific instances where the Lecturer wants students to work on their own in order to provide feedback on their progress. Indeed, getting the individual to explain the process or calculation to others can help encourage deeper student learning. One approach is to get individuals to take it in turns to tackle a problem, preferably set in advance, and explain it to the remainder of the group. However, this can be quite a daunting experience and should not be employed in new or large groups unless you are absolutely sure that the members of the group are likely to be happy with the experience.

Teamwork

The ability to work in teams is valued by industry; most organisations base their activities on teamwork. Teaching methods such as Problem-based Learning (PBL) and Enquiry-based Learning (EBL) are based around students working in teams. Students therefore benefit from developing their team-working skills so that they can perform to their full potential in both their

academic studies and in their career.

Points to note:

Discuss study methods as well as tasks.

- Help students to learn how to learn.
- Help students to learn about the processes of group interaction as well as the performance of group tasks; Employers rate team skills highly.
- Allow time at the end of the session to summarise the outcomes with the whole group.
This should be linked with the session objectives.
- Develop some "ground rules" for the group as they may not be used to working in different ways.

5 Dealing with Students' Personal Problems

Because of their contact with students in smaller groups, and sometimes because of a greater closeness in age, TAs may sometimes be perceived as being more approachable than members of academic staff. TA's are not normally trained counsellors but although it is not usually a defined part of the job, it can be easy for a TA to be drawn into discussing student problems beyond their defined duties. Each TA should find out where students can go for advice and acquaint themselves with the student support systems within their School. There is a range of student support services provided centrally by the University and a list of these is found in Appendix A. It is very important to protect confidentiality and therefore information provided by students relating to their personal problems cannot be discussed with others without a student's consent. There are a number of basic rules that should be adhered to in such situations:

- Listen to the student and try not to offer your own opinion.
- If appropriate and acceptable (to the student), pass on serious problems to a member of the academic staff.
- Offer information rather than advice.
- Find out what sources of advice are available both within the University and within your own School so that you are able to provide the appropriate information.
- Make a note for your file of the conversation including the date, the issues discussed and the information given.

6 Assessment

Although the summative assessment of students' work is not normally part of a TA's duties, TA's are often involved in formative assessment. This means that it is important to correct assignments and return them, providing as much feedback and help as possible about areas for improvement, concepts that have been misunderstood and incorrect calculations. Feedback to students concerning the results of the assessment should be delivered within the timescales

set out in the University policy on feedback to students. It is essential to establish the agreed marking scheme for a piece of work. The course leader will normally moderate any marking so that there is consistency between the standards of marking adopted by different TAs. It is good practice for students to receive a copy of the marking scheme and course leaders are encouraged to provide this.

7 Plagiarism

Guidance to students in the '*plagiarism and other forms of academic malpractice*' policy states that, "Plagiarism is presenting the ideas, work or words of other people without proper, clear and unambiguous acknowledgement. It also includes 'self-plagiarism' (which occurs where, for example, you submit work that you have presented for assessment on a previous occasion), and the submission of material from 'essay banks' (even if the authors of such material appear to be giving you permission to use it in this way)." Plagiarism is regarded as a serious academic offence and the consequences can be severe. The academic teaching staff responsible for the class should have minimized the opportunity for academic malpractice by using a number of available measures such as varying assessment tasks and topics from year to year. The Turnitin software used by the University has sophisticated plagiarism detection features.

As part of their role, TAs may be called upon to give advice to students in preparing their reports and other written work, and as part of this plagiarism should be discussed. TAs may also be involved in the assessment process where plagiarism may be detected. Guidance for the students can be provided in a range of formats but should include the guidelines listed below. TAs should be aware of these guidelines and able to discuss them with students.

- Coursework, dissertations and essays submitted for assessment must be the student's own work; unless in the case of team or group projects a joint effort is expected and it is indicated that this is the case.
- Unacknowledged direct copying from the work of another person, or the close paraphrasing of somebody else's work, is called plagiarism and is a serious offence, equated with cheating in examinations. This also applies to copying or minimally adapting text, computer programs, diagrams, graphs or illustrations from other students' work or the work of staff and from published sources such as books, reports, journal articles and from the internet or other electronic/AV sources.
- The use of quotations or data from the work of others is entirely acceptable, and is often very valuable provided that the source of the quotation or data is given. When quoting word-for-word from the work of another person quotation marks or indenting (setting the quotation in from the margin) must be used and the source of the quoted material must be acknowledged using the appropriate referencing format
- Paraphrasing, when the original statement is still identifiable and has no acknowledgement, is still plagiarism. Taking a piece of text, from whatever source,

and substituting words or phrases with other words or phrases is plagiarism. Any paraphrase of another person's work must have an acknowledgement to the source.

- Direct quotations from an earlier piece of the student's own work, if unattributed, suggests that the work is original, when in fact it is not. The direct copying of one's own writings qualifies as (self) plagiarism if the fact that the work has been or is to be presented elsewhere is not acknowledged.
- Sources of quotations used should be listed in full in a reference list/bibliography at the end of the piece of work and in a style required by the student's School. Applications such as Endnote can be extremely helpful in compiling, organising and accurately referencing sources.

8 Summary

The role of TA is a complex and important one. TAs make an important contribution to teaching and learning within the university and in so doing have a notable impact on the student experience. The University supports the development of TA skills through the provision of training courses, on-line and other resources (such as this one) and all TAs who envisage developing an academic career are encouraged to consider seeking recognition as a HEA associate fellow. Much skill development is through undertaking the work of a TA and the information in this handbook should support you in this task. It is in the joint interests of you as a TA, the University and students for you to be successful in your role. Remember to seek help and advice if you need it and invest time in session preparation.

Appendix 1

HEA recognition process – overview

TAs have previously been able to complete relevant training and assessment and then individually submit to the Higher Education Academy (HEA) for recognition at level 1, Associate Fellow of the HEA (AFHEA). In 2013/14 the University gained accreditation from the HEA for a development framework for Teaching Assistants, Demonstrators and Researchers which allows participating schools to assess a portfolio of evidence of achievement in relation to the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) and award AFHEA recognition. HEA accreditation and/or a recognised professional teaching qualification are increasingly prevalent requirements for appointment to academic posts.

The core assessment requirements are:

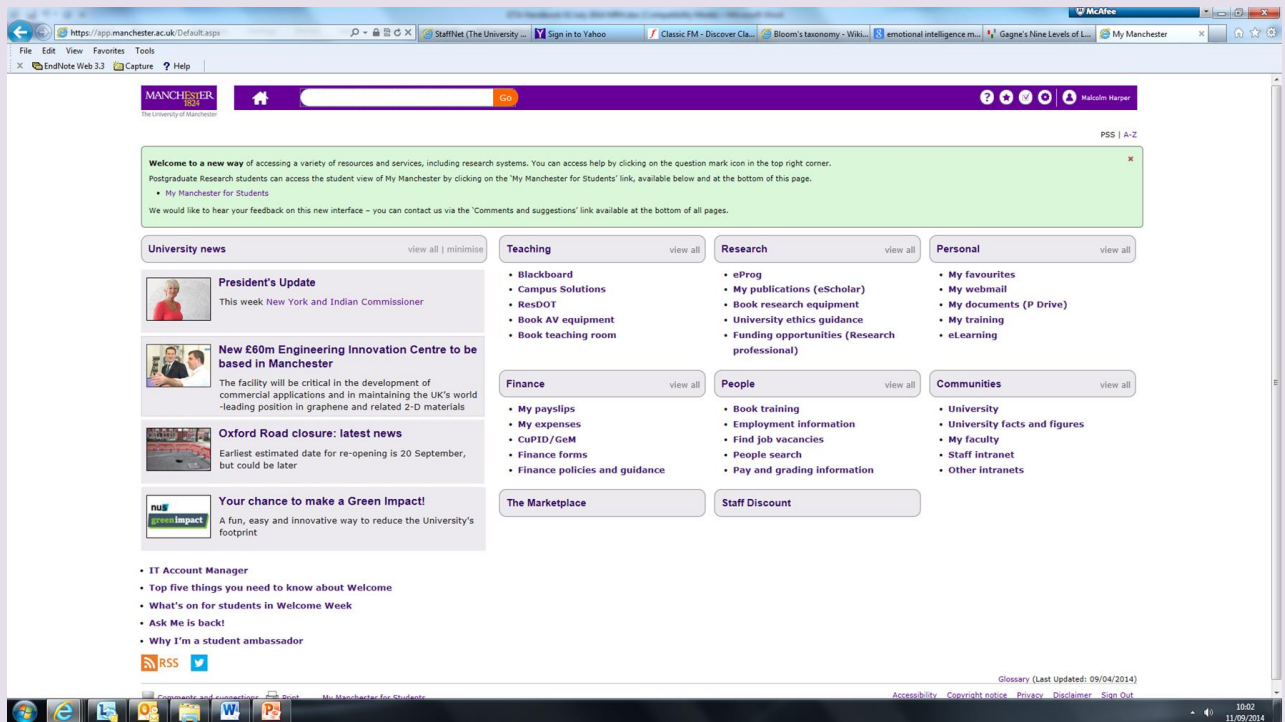
- The participants must demonstrate an understanding of specific aspects of effective, teaching and learning support methods and student learning (linked to UKPSF specified areas of activity and core knowledge)
- All assessments should include clear and appropriate examples of practice in line with the four values set out in the UKPSF
- Individuals should be able to provide evidence of effectiveness in relation to their professional role(s), which typically will include at least some teaching and/or learning support responsibilities
- Summative assessment is via the examination of a Reflective Portfolio which must contain assessable work of sufficient breadth, depth and quality to satisfy the UKPSF requirements and the above criteria. This includes:
 - A reflective report of at least 1,000 words
 - Evidence of the preparation and delivery of 7+ hours of teaching/demonstrations/e-learning content delivery with examples that demonstrate application of the professional values
 - Formative evidence in the form of a reflective diary/notes on the learning journey completed during the course of a particular programme/course of learning
 - This may be supplemented on particular schemes by records of the observation of, and feedback on, teaching and support activities; evidence of mentoring and mentor feedback; peer discussions and review notes, etc. However, these are not core requirements in relation to achieving HEA recognition.

Further Guidance on completing your application for HEA associate fellowship will be provided in the online training unit and in your school/discipline area training

Appendix 2

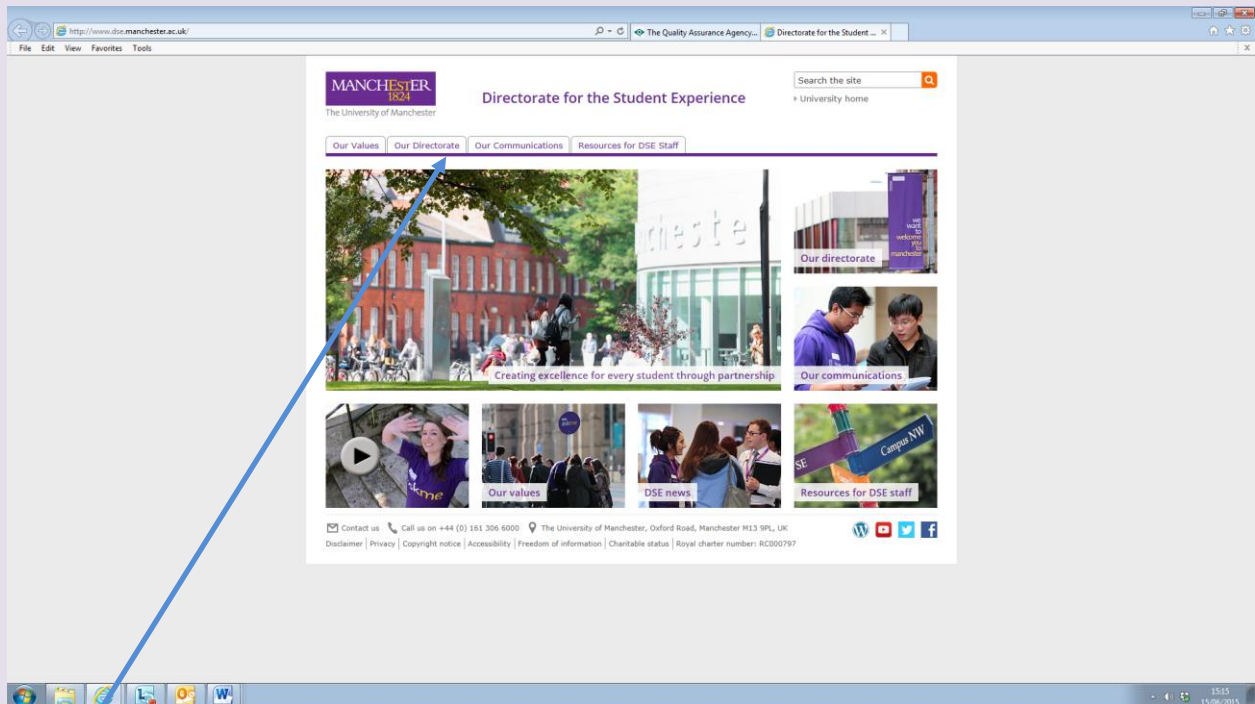
Key contacts for support and welfare of students

My Manchester for students is now the portal for student access to a wide range of university information:



INSERT VIEW CAPTURED BY STUDENT ID

To better support the student experience a wide range of university services are now available via **the Directorate for Student Experience:**



Our services - Student Support and Wellbeing

The Counselling Service offers confidential help with any personal issues affecting work, self-esteem, relationships, mental health and general well-being.

Tel: 0161 275 2864 (52864 from an internal phone)

Fax: 0161 275 2281

Email: counselling.service@manchester.ac.uk

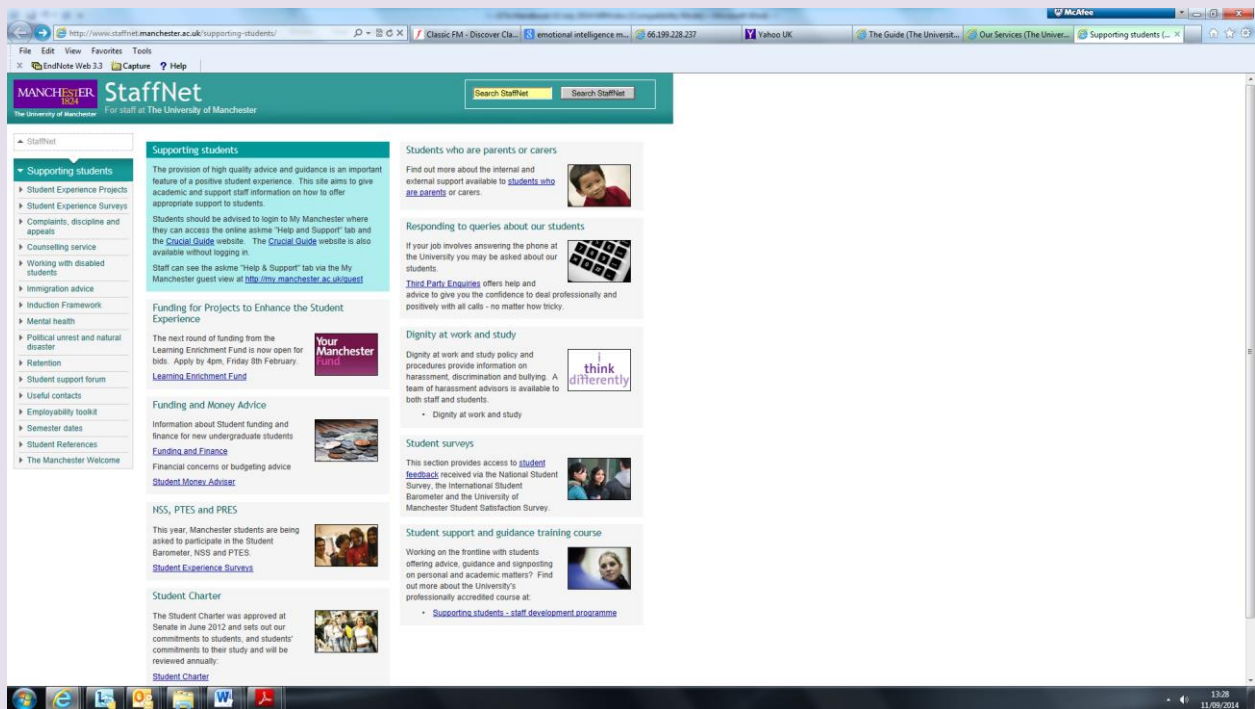
University of Manchester Counselling Service
5th Floor, Crawford House
Precinct Centre
Booth Street East
Manchester
M13 9QS

The Disability Support Office provides support for disabled staff and students in the University and also offers support and advice to prospective students and employees.

You can contact us by email at dso@manchester.ac.uk or by telephone to 0161 275 7512.

SPORT, Health and Fitness provide a range of social and competitive opportunities for staff and students to play sport and be active.

Supporting Students provides assistance to staff in offering the right type of support to students:



Equality and Diversity

Address: G.035b John Owens Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9PL

Building 48 on campus map

Phone: 0161 306 5857

Fax: 0161 306 5877

E-mail: equalityanddiversity@manchester.ac.uk

Website: [Equality and Diversity Website](#)

Student Services Centre

The Student Services Centre (SSC) at the University is a central point for information for all students and can provide advice specific to international students.

The SSC provides a wide range of services including those related to:

- immigration;
- examinations;
- certificates;
- transcripts;
- sources of funding;
- fee payment;
- registration.

If you need help with any practical matters of university life, the SSC will always be happy to help you.

Contact the Student Services Centre

The Student Services Centre (number 57 on the campus map)

Burlington Street

Oxford Road

Manchester

M13 9PL

Tel: +44 (0) 161 275 5000

STUDENTS' UNION:

Our Address is the University of Manchester Students' Union, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PR.

See this location on [Google maps](#)

E: info.su@manchester.ac.uk

T: 0161 275 2930

 www.facebook.com/ManchesterSU

 www.twitter.com/ManchesterSU

Appendix 4: List of some relevant university policies/guidance

- A step by step guide to setting up your workstation (DSE)
- Consensual relationships policy
- Academic writing and research resources + slides+ presentation*
- Acceptable use of IT policy
- Accident, incident and near-miss procedure and Accident report form
- Active learning*
- Adding a reading list to blackboard*
- A student guide to downloading feedback from Turnitin
- How to view and mark turnitin/grademark assignments by group
- Alternative assessments for study abroad and Erasmus students
- Blackboard 9 – a quick introduction for staff (= other blackboard guidance)*
- Conduct and discipline of students regulations
- Consensual relationships policy
- Dignity at work and study policy
- DSO information
- Feedback to students policy
- Fire
- First aid
- Guide to data handling
- Guidance to students on plagiarism and academic malpractice
- Group working - guidance on assessment student work
- Mitigating circumstances policy and procedure
- Mind genius guide*
- Mind map guide*
- Writing aims and intended learning outcomes*

Appendix 5: The University of Manchester Student Charter

Our Learning Experience

Together we will:

- Mutually commit to hard work and a desire to achieve our best.

As a student I will:

- Attend, and prepare for, all my scheduled teaching sessions and other learning events, such as induction and meetings with academic advisors.
- Complete all my assignments and submit on time.
- Know that I am free to declare any issues that will affect my learning experience (such as illness or disability), so that I can be supported correctly.

As a University we will:

- Provide you with an excellent student experience based upon personalised learning.
- Organise teaching and timetables to enhance the learning experience, creating a sense of academic identity and providing prompt information via [My Manchester](#).
- Treat you as a partner in the planning and operation of your teaching programme.
- Keep the curriculum up to date and use our research, where feasible and appropriate, to inform the curriculum.
- Support you in your studies through academic advice, providing prompt and useful feedback on assessments, and opportunities for discussion of this feedback.
- Ensure you have access to advice, counselling and other specialist support services (such as support if you are a disabled student) for the duration of your time at the University.

2. Personal and academic development

Together we will:

- Actively engage with all learning opportunities with the aim of constructively challenging and broadening one another.

As a student I will:

- Engage as an independent learner and take responsibility for achieving my potential as a Manchester student.
- Prepare for the world of work and monitor my development of knowledge, skills and personal attributes.

As a University we will:

- Ensure you have access to a range of opportunities to improve your skills and employability, and encourage you to engage with such opportunities.
- Ensure that you have a diverse range of extra-curricular activities on offer through both the University and the Students' Union, and encourage you to take part in those activities.
- Prepare you for citizenship and leadership in a diverse, global environment.
- Provide you with opportunities to reflect upon your personal development.
- Ensure that all of our spaces are fit for purpose and provide a safe study environment.
- Provide you with access to careers information, guidance and support until two years after you've graduated.

3. Communicating and interacting with each other

Together we will:

- Communicate with openness, respect and honesty, exemplified by transparency and constructive dialogue.

As a student I will:

- Keep up to date with, and respond in a timely manner to, University and UMSU communications.
- Engage in feedback mechanisms that seek to evaluate my learning experience.
- Express my views to student representatives and officers of the Students' Union so that they can represent me effectively.

As a University we will:

- Provide you with information to help you plan your studies, including transparent information on contact time and the likely cost of studying on your programme.
- Use appropriate technology to teach and communicate with you, where available and when it enhances your learning experience.
- Provide you with full, accurate and accessible information about the University, its facilities, programmes and regulations.
- Work in partnership across the University to set and deliver consistent levels of service for you.
- Demonstrate high professional standards when interacting with you.
- Listen to you and respond to any concerns regarding your learning in a timely manner.
- Respond in a fair, timely and transparent manner to academic complaints and appeals.

4. Respecting and valuing each other

Together we will:

- Study and work in an environment where people embrace and value diversity and are committed to equality of opportunity.
- Respect each other and treat each other fairly at all times, free from discrimination and harassment.

As a student I will:

- Conduct my academic studies in an honest and professional manner, including not plagiarising.
- Comply with the regulations, policies, and procedures of the University and the Students' Union.
- Abide by the requirements of professional bodies, where my studies are accredited by such professional bodies.

As a University we will:

- Provide you with opportunities to fulfil your social responsibilities through peer support, wider engagement with the community, and extra-curricular activities such as volunteering.
- Ensure an accessible environment for you.

5. Being part of our community

Together we will:

- Be a positive and responsible part of our local community, respecting the views of our neighbours and the communities in which we live together.
- Live, study and work in an environmentally sustainable way.

As a student I will:

- Behave in a responsible manner and act as an ambassador for the University.

As a University we will:

- Ensure that a range of safe, well-maintained and fairly priced University accommodation is available to you and foster a sense of community at each venue.
- Offer advice to you about living in non-University accommodation.