UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT IN PRINCIPAL ACADEMIC UNITS

Index of points

1. Introduction
2. Responsibilities within the Student Development and Support Partnership
3. Minimum Requirements for Student Development and Support
4. Quality Assurance and Enhancement

1. Introduction

1.1 This Code of Practice relates to the minimum standards required to support students on taught programmes at the University. It sets out a framework, which should be followed by Principal Academic Units providing support and development in the following areas:

1.1 (a) individual student support within the Principal Academic Unit, including welfare issues;

1.1 (b) progress review tutorials;

1.1 (c) review of academic feedback;

1.1 (d) skills support and advice; and

1.1 (e) review of student's personal development planning.

1.2 Every Principal Academic Unit should have a Head of Student Development and Support with defined responsibilities for student development and support. How those functions are delegated or arranged within the Principal Academic Unit, however, is an internal matter. The role of individual Student Tutor (Tutor) is indicative only and is used to demonstrate the responsibilities that must be assigned to Principal Academic Unit staff. How a Principal Academic Unit chooses to divide these duties is an internal issue, but the arrangements established must meet the framework described. Principal Academic Units will need to define the role of Tutor (and identify the nomenclature specific to their Principal Academic Unit, Departments or disciplines) and the functions that it encompasses through the Principal Academic Unit Support Policy.

1.3 This Code of Practice is underpinned by University support services, details of which should be communicated to students through Principal Academic Unit support discussions, documentation and general contact with students.

1.4 The student experience is intensely formative, requiring relatively frequent monitoring through the tutor-student partnership. The prime responsibility for these processes, however, lies with the student. Tutorial and other support provision is designed to help students learn how to manage these processes. Whilst academic results provide measurable data, it is important not to lose sight of the overall skills and capabilities that are being developed by students in all fields of life. Thus, it is important to ensure that the student can, from the beginning, set and work towards long-term objectives and not, for instance, leave career planning to the last stages of their university programme.

1.5 Consistent with this view, Principal Academic Units are now provided with a »Progress» WebCT Section, which each Principal Academic Unit may customise to suit its own special character, so as to provide support in the follow areas:

1.5 (a) feedback of assessment results, and, where working methods permit, of comment on assessed work;

1.5 (b) skills analysis, and download of a resulting document for inspection or

discussion;

1.5 (c) generation of a basic CV;

1.5 (d) careers Service information, frequently asked questions, tools and support; and

1.5 (e) Personal Skills Award information.

2. Responsibilities within the Student Development and Support Partnership

2.1 Responsibilities of the University Corporate Services

2.1.1 Corporate Services will:

2.1.1 (a) provide documentation, staff induction, staff training and development programme(s) for tutors;

2.1.1 (b) provide a system of support that augments Principal Academic Unit-based and individual student needs; and

2.1.1 (c) support and enhance the Head of Student Development and Support network, by providing information and opportunities for sharing common issues and good practice ideas.

2.2 Responsibilities of the Principal Academic Unit

2.2.1 The Head of the Principal Academic Unit is responsible for ensuring that appropriate development and support mechanisms are provided for all students on taught programmes. The coordination of this function will be delegated to the Head of Student Development and Support in the Principal Academic Unit. This member of staff should provide guidance and leadership to staff who are supporting students and be the first point of contact for the University's support services.

2.2.2 The Principal Academic Unit should ensure the student is supported through their programme of study and should direct the student to appropriate services in the University for specialist and detailed advice and guidance. Principal Academic Units should provide advice and support for staff about when it is appropriate to support the student and when the students should be directed to other University services.

2.2.3 Support for students should be perceived as a partnership between the Principal Academic Unit and Corporate Services. Staff should liaise with the appropriate Corporate Services Unit for advice, guidance and support when working with students. Staff should also be aware of when it is appropriate to refer students directly to the required Corporate Services Unit, for instance, when a case becomes more complex or specialist.

2.2.4 The Head of Student Development and Support should ensure that the mechanisms and arrangements listed below are in place:

2.2.5 A Principal Academic Unit Development and Support Policy should be published identifying the arrangements for tutoring and academic feedback for

students in relation to the specific requirements of the Principal Academic Unit, Department and programme. In multi-departmental Principal Academic Units the policy should clearly state responsibilities at Principal Academic Unit level and those undertaken by the component departments. The policy should explicitly include information about tutorial arrangements for students where programmes are delivered jointly with other Principal Academic Units or Departments. The policy should be reviewed and approved annually at the appropriate Principal Academic Unit Committee.

2.2.6 Specific consideration should be given, within the Principal Academic Unit Policy for Student Development and Support to joint honours (including major/minor) students and to students taking programmes with different modes of delivery, for example, distance learning, part-time, those delivered off campus.

2.2.7 Student support guidance should be made available for all staff that undertake a student support role, including visiting and part time teaching staff. The Guidance should clarify their responsibilities and provide information about:

2.2.7 (a) University Corporate Services;

2.2.7 (b) Principal Academic Unit arrangements and training for student support; and

2.2.7 (c) tools available to support the process.

2.2.8 Training opportunities, induction and briefing meetings should also be arranged to ensure a consistent and confident approach to the Tutor role. Within the guidance information provided by Principal Academic Units/Departments, templates should be available, with model-agendas for tutorial meetings. The Principal Academic Unit should liaise with the appropriate Corporate Services to arrange training and briefing opportunities.

2.2.9 Student's tutors should ensure that the student has contact details for them, including office telephone number and email address. There are a number of ways that tutor-student contact can take place, but there should be at least two meetings during the academic year. Tutors must ensure that an appropriate length of time is available for meetings with students. Tutors should contact students initially to arrange the first meeting of the academic year. They should also follow-up students who do not attend these meetings, although it is the responsibility of the student to act with reasonable diligence in communicating about and attending support opportunities.

2.2.10 Students should know how to contact their tutors, although arrangements will vary between Principal Academic Units and Departments. This could be done through published office hours, bookable appointments or a regular tutorial slot, but it is important that students feel that they can contact their tutors, if necessary.

2.3 Responsibilities of Students

2.3.1 Students are primarily responsible for their own development and learning. They should access support, advice and guidance to improve and develop their academic work and personal skills, to enhance their University

experience and to improve subsequent career opportunities.

2.3.2 Students should ensure that they obtain information about University systems and communicate effectively with Principal Academic Unit staff and Corporate Services to ensure that support opportunities are maximised, as appropriate for the individual.

2.3.3 Students should ensure that they attend all tutorial meetings, including induction lectures or meetings, group tutorial sessions or individual tutorial meetings. It is the student's responsibility to attend the meetings that are booked with their Tutor in the Principal Academic Unit and students should respond to opportunities for meetings with diligence. It is expected that students will communicate with their Tutors if they are unable to attend the scheduled meeting or need to re-arrange the meeting, and should respond if their Tutor contacts them.

2.3.4 Students should read communications from the Principal Academic Unit and/or the University to ensure they are aware of processes and arrangements for all aspects of their programme, particularly in terms of assessment, exams, mitigations and appeals. It is expected that they will access their emails and read and respond to communications from the Department, Principal Academic Unit or University in a timely fashion. Students should be aware of, and access frequently, the Student Portal.

2.3.5 When communicating with staff by email students should be aware that staff may only access email at set times and therefore an immediate response may not be possible. Further, students should not expect communication during University holiday and closed periods.

3. Minimum Requirements for Student Development and Support

3.1 Tutorial Arrangements:

3.1.1 All students should:

3.1.1 (a) be informed of a designated member of staff who will act as their Student Tutor within the Principal Academic Unit for matters relating to their progress, development and welfare. The student should be given clear contact details for this member of staff;

3.1.1 (b) be informed of the person who co-ordinates Student Development and Support within the Principal Academic Unit or Department (and be informed of the member of staff responsible for mitigation, if this is a different person, and any other key staff responsible for elements of student support);

3.1.1 (c) have an induction, at the beginning of their programme of study, which includes:

(i) a student handbook or resource that clearly states the requirements of the student in relation to issues such as mitigation, regulations, reasonable diligence, attendance requirements and plagiarism;

(ii) a talk which covers the major areas identified in the documentation;

(iii) an initial session, individually or in a group, with their Tutor, where the Principal Academic Unit Student Support Scheme will be clearly explained to the student. The timing and nature of this initial session (opportunity) should be identified in the Principal Academic Unit Support Policy, particularly identifying arrangements for students who are entering higher education for the first time; and

(iv) an explanation of the student's responsibility towards managing their progress and the function of the tutorial system in that context.

3.1.1 (d) have the opportunity to attend, at least, two scheduled, individual meetings during the academic year with their Tutor. (Where the student is on a distance-learning programme, these tutorials may be e-tutorials). It is suggested that, after the initial meeting, these should take place in subsequent terms and should include discussions on:

(i) progress: review of achievements and setting of targets: the student should bring the materials necessary for meaningful discussion of their progress, both academically and more generally. The role of the Student Tutor is to encourage the student to engage with the necessary issues, to offer support where it is needed, and to ensure targets are set. It is not to conduct a lengthy review of all aspects of the material provided; and

(ii) welfare and similar issues: The student should raise any matters, which may be affecting their progress. The role of the Student Tutor is, so far as possible, to direct the student to appropriate resources and sources of support. Their Tutor should also remind the student of the importance of recording and submitting mitigating circumstances in the appropriate manner, and of the need to obtain appropriate evidence to support the mitigation submitted.

3.1.2 Discussion held with a Student Tutor cannot constitute or substitute for the submission of a formal mitigation for consideration by Boards of Examiners or Mitigation Panels.

3.2 Academic Feedback:

3.2.1 Feedback to students should focus on their performance against the module learning outcomes. The assessment criteria should relate directly to the learning outcomes identified in the module description, and the relationship between the learning outcomes and their performance (as measured through the assessment criteria for the individual assessment) should be explicit.

3.2.2 All students should:

(a) be given appropriate feedback on their academic performance in order to facilitate improvement and promote learning;

(b) be aware of both quantitative (marks and grades) and qualitative (content and skills) feedback arrangements for all assignments and coursework prior to the submission deadlines;

(c) be informed of the timescale for feedback arrangements. This should be timely (normally within four weeks of the submission date of the assessment/piece of work) so that they can adjust their patterns of work before subsequent assessment opportunities; and

(d) be aware of who will issue feedback to them and how this will be communicated to them. This should normally be stated in the Student Handbook and at the time the assignment is set. The nature of feedback will vary between modules, but students should be aware of the mechanisms in place, which provide them with information to aid their improved performance.

3.2.3 Arrangements for academic feedback will vary across the University, however, it would be expected that students receive specific feedback from module experts on assessed work. These arrangements may include the Student Tutor, but the Student Tutor should also provide a reflective opportunity for students to consider their overall performance. Different models will exist according to programme-specific requirements, but the Principal underlying this is that the student has both specific feedback (in-course assessment) and discussion about overall performance.

3.2.4 The link between academic and tutorial staff is very important and all staff should ensure that there is effective communication. Programme, module and assessment requirements will be Principal Academic Unit, Department or discipline specific, but effective communication between the module staff and the Student Tutors is a central component for effective student support.

3.3 Careers and Skills Development:

3.3.1 All students should:

(a) be given advice from the beginning of their studies about support services available within the Principal Academic Unit and the University to help them to make career decisions, produce a CV and understand the career opportunities available to them, as appropriate;

(b) be given the opportunity, and be encouraged from the beginning to undertake skills evaluation exercises, profession-based exercises or other appropriate material for the specific programme of study;

(c) be given the opportunity, and be encouraged, to sustain their personal development and career planning throughout their studies. Additionally, students need to be made aware of how skills development is embedded within academic programmes, and how this will be supported/enhanced through face-to-face sessions/workshops, online facilities and via other resources; and

(d) be supported in developing appropriate insights, skills and experience whilst they study.

3.3.2 Support may be provided through referral and liaison with Corporate Services.

4. Quality Assurance and Enhancement

4.1 The Head of Student Development and Support within the Principal Academic Unit must take responsibility for reviewing the arrangements in place annually. The policy and arrangements operated by the Principal Academic Unit should be reviewed and improved appropriately.

4.2 The University's quality assurance system requires review of the arrangements and confirmation that appropriate support mechanisms are in place.

4.3 Students and staff should be given an opportunity to feed into the policy and process for tutoring and academic feedback. Principal Academic Units should demonstrate that this input has been considered and processes have been reviewed appropriately. This may be through normal Principal Academic Unit mechanisms for student and staff feedback, i.e. questionnaires, student/staff fora, student representation systems, staff-student committees etc.