



Quality and Standards Manual

Handbook J: Supporting Student Academic Achievement

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- A Standards on Assessment, Feedback, and the Organisation and Management of Students' Learning Experience
- B Peer Observation of Teaching and Learning Guidelines
- C Operational Manual – to accompany the Undergraduate Modular Framework
- D Observation of Teaching Policy (Apprenticeships)
- E Educational Recordings Policy
- F Student Attendance and Academic Engagement Policy
- G Timetabling Policy and Guidance
- H Guidance for staff on Student Voice Meetings

INTRODUCTION

This Handbook sets out the University's procedures and practice relating to supporting students' academic achievement. This includes approved policies and guidance on arrival/induction, learning and teaching, and pastoral support. It does not include policies relating to students outside of the academic sphere, and policies which have not been approved by a committee, or other similar structure. Information on supporting postgraduate research students is also outside of the remit of this handbook and can be found in [Handbook G: Research Supervision and Assessment of Students Undertaking Research Programmes](#)

The Handbook is aligned to the Office for Students' Conditions of Registration. It is a working document and whilst reviewed and updated annually, policies and guidance contained herein will be updated and added to as and when required. This may not be limited to the start of the academic year.

Purpose

The purpose of this handbook is to promote good practice in supporting students academically, and also to act as a source of information for staff in the University on policies and procedures which relate to the support of students. This may be in the form of text within the handbook, reference to an appended policy/guidance document, or a link to another source.

SECTION A: PRE-ARRIVAL, ARRIVAL AND INDUCTION

Pre-arrival

Pre-entry activities

The University recognises the importance of engaging students before their arrival, and the benefits this can have on transition to University. It is therefore highly recommended that academic departments make contact with students between when an offer is made, through confirmation of offer to induction. Particular emphasis should be placed on providing information that will enable students to get to know the department and its staff, and giving an insight into the work that the department is undertaking.

Applicants with a declared disability

Applicants typically disclose a disability on their UCAS application form, University application and/or enrolment form (for non UCAS courses). This prompts contact from the Disability & Inclusion team within Student Services Support, to offer them the opportunity to discuss their needs and appropriate reasonable adjustments, with a view to enabling successful transition and settlement into their programme of study. On arrival at the University, there will be an opportunity to discuss further support with the Disability & Inclusion team. Details of the availability and type of support offered can be found on the Student Services Portal page here: [Student Services – Disability and Inclusion](#).

A student or applicant is regarded as disclosing a disability to the University if they advise **any** member of staff in **any** way, verbal, written or otherwise. The University then has obligations to assess and discuss reasonable adjustments via processes that Disability & Inclusion operate. All staff are therefore required to contact the Disability & Inclusion team to advise of any disclosure of disabilities made in any format as soon as possible following such disclosure.

Admission decisions are made on academic grounds in congruence with the University's Admissions policy, however the Disability & Inclusion team identify disabled students initially using UCAS data and issue Applicant Questionnaires to gather information for further assessment. Where particular risks are identified, or significant planning to accommodate needs becomes apparent, information may be shared with relevant academic and/or support departments to ensure appropriate and safe support can be provided. Applicants may be contacted for further information at this stage and invited to a telephone or face to face appointment.

On receipt of appropriate evidence (ref Section C) the Disability & Inclusion team will compile and issue an Inclusion Plan and where appropriate, SN1 (reasonable adjustments in exams) to relevant departments to communicate individual needs prior to their arrival at University. **Each academic department appoints a Disability Link**

Tutor whose role includes responsibility to accept and disseminate Inclusion Plans accordingly when issued directly by the Disability & Inclusion team. SN1 forms are issued directly by Disability & Inclusion to Registry Services and Faculty of Health and Social Care.

In a tandem process, applicants are supported by the Disability & Inclusion team to apply for and access Disabled Students' Allowances. Disability & Inclusion can provide information, advice and guidance on evidence requirements, the application and assessment process and how to access recommended funded support.

Student Privacy Notice

The University of Chester is committed to protecting the rights and freedoms of individuals as detailed in relevant Data Protection legislation including looking after any personal data that it collects, uses or hold. More information regarding the Student Privacy Notice can be found [here](#).

Arrival and induction

A number of centrally led induction activities are provided for students during their initial weeks at the University. This is managed by the Induction and Transition Manager in the Student Services department.

The Induction team coordinate activities to help new students at the University of Chester settle in to their new life as a student both academically and socially. This involves ensuring they complete their enrolment process and arrange payment of fees, providing information on the Pre-Arrival Student Site (PASS) which they access before they arrive. This also includes a Pre-Arrival E-Library with useful resources and materials to help them get a head start on their University journey. The team organise a number of events and activities, along with the Students Union to ensure the new arrivals have been introduced to their academic department and are aware of all the services and facilities available to them, preparing them for life at the University and providing opportunities for socialising and networking.

For the main cohort of undergraduate students arriving at the end of September this takes the form of Welcome Week, but for other cohorts of students events and information are targeted to them at an appropriate time of year. Please contact induction@chester.ac.uk if you have any questions.

Academic departments should also ensure that they provide an induction that includes programme-related activities that are appropriate to the time at which they are delivered. It is advised that programme teams plan a short term and longer term induction programme, sustained over the year.

SECTION B: ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Learning and Teaching

Peer observation of teaching

The University requires that staff observe a colleagues teaching and/or have their teaching observed, and record a commentary about their learning from the observation each academic year. The purpose of peer observation of teaching is to share and enhance learning and teaching within and across departments of the University, to benefit the student experience, and to provide an opportunity for reflection and development of teaching practice.

The instutiton has internally shared full guidelines on practice relating to the peer observation of teaching. Further information, guidelines and form can be found [here](#).

PAT policy, guidance and materials

The University operates a Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) system for undergraduate students. The role of the PAT is central to the University's student support system, and its function is to provide academic and pastoral support for students throughout their University career.

Advice and support materials for PATs can be found via the 'PAT Pack' on the University's Portal page [here](#).

Operational Manual – to accompany the Undergraduate Modular Framework

[Appendix A](#) provides a guide to accompany the University's [Undergraduate Module Framework](#), and offers advice and guidance on the following:

- Operation of the Undergraduate Modular Framework
- Learning and Teaching Objectives
- Administrative Arrangements
- Contact points for advice and guidance

This is updated annually by the Co-Directors of Undergraduate Modular Programmes, and provides a useful guidance on the management of the framework, assessment arrangements, and curriculum design.

Peer Mentoring

Peer mentoring can help to foster a stronger sense of belonging for students within an academic community, which has knock on benefits to student retention and success. The University's Peer Mentoring (PM) scheme matches current students with new

students, and encourages flexible interaction between them. Peer Mentors can help with a range of queries, from social issues, to money, living and study related issues.

Student Services also provide further information about [Peer Mentoring](#).

Developing Academic Skills

Study Skills Guidance

Academic Skills For Students (ASk) provides Study Skills provision, including maths and statistics, which supports students studying at University of Chester sites. Primarily, Study and Maths Skills Advisers work directly with academic staff to embed study and maths and statistics skills within module teaching and assessment. This might take the form of:

- Meeting with staff members to discuss methods of supporting students to develop and enhance study and/or maths and statistics skills in the context of their subject.
- Providing or creating study and/or maths and statistics skills resources or in-class activities which staff can either deliver themselves or which can be co-delivered with a Study or Maths Skills Adviser in a teaching session.

The embedding of academic skills within programmes and modules, as an integral part of curriculum design, is both supported and encouraged by the Learning and Teaching Institute (see Handbooks A and B).

Academic staff can arrange a meeting with a representative of the Study Skills Team to discuss the embedding of academic skills, and where considering academic skills within their overall curriculum design, they are advised to email their Faculty Senior University Teaching Fellow and the Ask team (ASk@chester.ac.uk) in the first instance.

The Study Skills team offer support to students on the following topics:

- Stepping up at university. This includes support with transition to university and through each level of study, including postgraduate study.
- Time and task management.
- Academic integrity and referencing. This includes support to understand how and why citations are needed to support ideas; strategies for developing good academic practice, including: paraphrasing, summarising and quoting; APA and MHRA referencing support.
- Reading and note-making. This includes developing reading strategies for academic purposes to aid comprehension and developing active note-making when reading and listening.
- Academic writing. This includes assignment planning; structure; writing style; grammar and punctuation; and proof reading and editing your own work.

- Critical thinking. This includes the critical selection, analysis and evaluation of sources and creating arguments in academic writing
- Reflective learning. This includes developing reflective practice and reflective writing.
- Revision and exams. This includes exam revision, preparation and managing exams on the day.
- Posters and presentations. This includes oral and written communication and group work.
- Maths and statistics. This includes developing numerical problem solving and providing guidance on statistics and probability.

The Study Skills team develop students' learning by designing and delivering extra-curricular workshops and webinars; e-resources; face-to-face individual support which includes remote support via video using MS Teams. For more information, please see the ASk Portal page [here](#). All students should contact ASk@chester.ac.uk with any enquiries.

Information Literacy Guidance

Learning and Information Services provide information literacy support and teaching for students of all levels. Subject librarians work directly with academic departments to embed information literacy skills within module teaching and assessment. This might take the form of:

- Delivering specific taught sessions on core information literacy skills such as finding / evaluating relevant academic sources and undertaking literature searches.
- Offering a range of additional voluntary taught and drop-in support sessions within libraries.
- Meeting with staff members to discuss methods of supporting students to develop and enhance information literacy within their subject.
- Providing one to one consultations within students and staff to address specific information literacy needs.
- Providing a range of online guides and learning materials available via Portal.

Subject librarians offer (including taught sessions) on the following topics:

- Navigating and managing reading lists
- Identifying relevant books, journal articles and other information sources for topics
- Evaluating information sources for authority, accuracy and relevancy
- Undertaking literature searches for literature review
- Using a range of specialist information sources and research databases
- Managing and organising references
- Keeping up to date with research in a given field
- Understanding copyright compliance and protecting your work

Academic staff can arrange a meeting with the relevant specialist subject librarian to discuss support available for students and themselves, including making arrangements for the team delivering taught sessions. Subject librarian contacts are available on Portal [here](#).

Development Weeks

The names of these weeks may be updated but the concept will remain the same with improvements and amendments being made based on evaluation feedback and ongoing research. Specifically identified Learning and Teaching weeks are set aside for Flexible Learning Student Development Activities.

Academic departments are encouraged to offer suggestions that support departments can deliver for their students or organise specific activities for their own students (for example, field trips, conferences etc). Central departments are also to offer seminars, workshops and events targeted at Levels 4, 5 and 6 of undergraduate study including the ECDL qualification, Careers and Employability sessions and Study Skills workshops.

A detailed programme of what's on will be available on Portal for new students early in the new academic year under the [Student Services tile – Induction and Transition](#). This will also be circulated to support and academic staff, who are encouraged to promote to all students. Promotional lecture slides will also be available and advertisements will be found across all campuses.

Development Weeks should be highlighted in Programme Handbooks and during departmental induction activities in order to promote the weeks to students. They should however already be aware of these weeks following advertisements in the documentation they receive prior to their arrival at the University.

In addition to Development Weeks, Digital Skills Weeks will be provided be provided as appropriate.

Academic Progression

Turnitin Guidelines

Students must submit all assessed work which can be handed in electronically to Turnitin for originality checking. This applies to all summative assessments submitted for a University of Chester award at levels 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and taught provision at level 8.

Guidance on the use of Turnitin in online assignment submission for staff can be found [here](#), and for students can be found [here](#). The staff documentation from Registry includes how to set up an online submission on Moodle, and advice and guidance on interpreting reports, and when to raise as an instance of malpractice.

Policies and procedures

Social Media – guidance for acceptable use

Acceptable use of Social Media for staff is covered in the policy developed by Human Resource Management Services (HRMS) available [here](#).

Policies relating to the appropriate use of social media in an academic setting are currently in development.

Other Student-Related Policies and Guidance

Student Services Support, Development and Proctor's Office provide links to policies, procedures and guidance for students on a range of matters relating to the student experience, which are not included in other quality and standards manuals. These can be found on the corporate page [here](#).

SECTION C: OTHER PASTORAL SUPPORT

Inclusion - reflecting student diversity

The University aims to help support all students, including disabled students, with inclusivity being at the core of what we do for each student, regardless of any particular status. The University has developed an [Increasing Inclusivity Policy](#), which provides advice and guidance on academic practice which incorporates support for students. This policy sets out the University's minimum requirements for inclusivity, and will be reviewed regularly.

Further advice on inclusive learning and teaching has also been provided by the Equality Challenge Unit, which can be found [here](#).

Supporting students with a declared disability

The Disability & Inclusion team of Student Services Support offers information, advice and guidance with regard to reasonable adjustments for disabled students. Disability is used in its broadest sense and includes the following:

- SpLD such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit disorder etc.
- Autistic Spectrum Conditions
- Unseen disabilities such as chronic fatigue syndrome and epilepsy
- Mental Health Conditions
- Mobility impairments
- Sensory impairments

All information relating to support offered by the Disability & Inclusion team and advice for staff can be found on the corporate site [here](#).

Privacy Notice – Disability and Inclusion

The University of Chester Student Services Disability and Inclusion Service Privacy Notice can be found [here](#).

Inclusion Plan

Once acceptable evidence has been received, disabled students' needs will be communicated by the [Disability & Inclusion team via an Inclusion Plan](#). This document contains details of the student, their course and nature of their disability amongst other information. Inclusion Plans are designed to formally notify academic and other support departments of a student's support needs and are compiled from evidence or from a combination of evidence, negotiation and agreement with students as necessary. The University retains the right to discuss and potentially decline support recommendations for reasonable adjustments if they are detrimental to other students, functions or policies of the University in any way; Disability & Inclusion staff will discuss this fully with the student concerned.

Reasonable Adjustments in Professional Placements (RAPP)

Supporting students on professional placements is an area that disabled students often require additional planning and support with, in order to agree appropriate reasonable adjustments with the Placement Provider. The Disability & Inclusion team have dedicated portion of the corporate pages, which can be found [here](#). If after consulting these pages you have any further questions about support in placement settings, please contact the Disability & Inclusion team via email at disability@chester.ac.uk, telephone 01244 511550.

Recording of lectures

The University allows students to record lectures in accordance with the University's Recording Agreement.

Acceptable evidence of a disability

Whilst disclosure of a disability can be considered in any format (for example verbally or via email), sufficient evidence for the University to provide reasonable adjustments is more measured. In the interests of clarity and consistency, the University follows the Equality Act 2010 definition of disability and consults the [Equality Act 2010 Guidance](#).

Fitness to Study Policy

A healthy environment for all students and staff and active promotion of positive health and well-being across the institution are important. The University recognises that many students may experience difficulties related to health and aims to provide support and flexibility to enable students to fulfil their potential. University support services offer comprehensive support to those students experiencing health or any other difficulties.

The latest version of this policy can be accessed [here](#).

Preparing for Employment

The University's Careers and Employability department provides a number of schemes and services to support student's skills development in preparation for employment. More details about the department and the services it offers can be found [here](#).

SECTION D: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT & FEEDBACK

The University's of Chester's vision and values hold student engagement, involvement in decision making and partnership learning at the centre of all aspects of the student experience. This includes embedding student participation in academic quality assurance and enhancement processes.

Student Voice Representation system

Student Voice Reps (SVRs) are volunteers who provide an invaluable role by working with other students and staff to ensure everyone's voice is heard. The main job of a SVR is to gather feedback from students on a variety of themes. These can be academic and non-academic, as well as positive and negative. They share this feedback at meetings with University staff and the Students' Union.

The student representation system at University of Chester is lead by the Chester Students' Union in collaboration with the University. Further details, information and handbooks can be found on the CSU website: <https://www.chestersu.com/representation/svrs> and from studentreps@chester.ac.uk.

Guidance for staff on Student Voice Meetings

The University of Chester (the University) and Chester Students' Union (CSU) are committed to working in partnership to provide effective structures for student feedback and representation. The Student Experience Representation System provides a framework in which students can have a direct input towards decisions regarding their academic programmes, with representatives feeding into structured feedback meetings.

Every student at every level of every programme will have access to representation, and as a result, will be able to influence their student learning experience through their representatives. This will take place through Student Voice Meetings which may occur at various levels (e.g. departmental, programme). These are the key point of communication between Student Experience Representatives (SVRs) and academic departments and should take place at least once per term. Ideally, the Student Voice Meetings in the first two terms will take place in a face to face format, then the meeting in the third term can take place by the most appropriate means, which could be remotely/online. Circumstances may mean that remote/online meetings are preferable or even required at other times.

It is expected that SVRs will collect feedback, both in areas of good practice and areas for improvement, from their cohorts in advance of the meeting and this should be shared with the Chair at least one week before the meeting starts to allow for responses to be formed or possible actions to be explored before the meeting starts. This then allows for a discussion of actions to improve the student experience during the meeting. It is also good practice to talk to SVRs if there are certain areas of the course if there is any specific feedback that the department would like (for example, on something that has been changed following feedback the previous year) to check to see if previous changes have had the desired impact on the student experience.

Student Voice Meetings will be chaired by the relevant staff member. Those at the meeting should be free to discuss any topics relating to learning and teaching. These may include, but are not limited to, issues such as:

- Minutes from the last meeting
- Matters arising
- Reports from Chair and other relevant staff Outcomes from previous student feedback and actions taken
- Student Feedback on areas such as:
 - overall quality of programmes and modules
 - learning and teaching methods
 - assessment methods and feedback on assessed work
 - the provision of study skills support, general student support and/or supervision
 - learning resources
 - facilities, and study space
- External examiner reports (these should always be discussed at the appropriate meeting of the Student Voice Meeting)
- Updates to CME actions from action plans
- Discussion of institutional surveys (NSS, UGES, Postgraduate Experience Surveys, etc.)
- Discussion of global issues identified by PATs

The meetings must be seen as a safe space for ideas and issues to be discussed broadly and should, therefore, not engage in discussion of:

- Individual staff members
- Individual students
- Personal complaints/grievances/appeals

All dates and times for Student Voice Meetings should be set by academic departments prior to induction week and communicated to the relevant SVR, and also the Student Academic Representation Team (studentreps@chester.ac.uk) to allow co-ordination, as soon as possible. Meetings should be chaired by the Head of Department or designate, whilst being minuted by a member of departmental staff to produce an accurate record of the meeting.

Student Voice Meeting minutes should always include attendees, issues/good practice identified and agreed action for resolution.

Following each meeting minutes should be circulated to the respective Student Experience Representatives and the student body within the course/department detailing the issues raised, actions agreed and timescales of implementation. Sharing actions at the beginning of lectures and explaining previous decisions to the subsequent cohort should also take place to allow for continuous development. It is also good practice to post the minutes onto the programme Moodle space to allow students to access them and (if possible) key actions taken could be shared through posters around the department.

All Boards of Studies should receive annually a schedule of Student Voice meetings to be held by departments within the Faculty, and at each meeting receive departmental synopses of key matters raised and, as appropriate, any associated action plans to address such matters. Sharing Student Voice Meeting outcomes at the Board of Studies Meetings facilitates the sharing of good practice and helps highlight if any issues identified by the SVRs cross the faculty and may require cross- departmental collaboration. This is all a key part of completing the Feedback Loop, and more guidance can be found below.

In order to facilitate collaborative working with CSU, Student Voice Meeting minutes must also be sent to the Academic Representation team (studentreps@chester.ac.uk) at Chester Students' Union within two weeks of the meeting. This will allow the Academic Representation team to escalate frequently raised issues that cannot be solved at departmental level to through the appropriate channels, giving the University chance to respond to student feedback in a timely manner.

For further information and guidance for staff please contact enhancement@chester.ac.uk.

Student Survey Results

Results from student surveys, for the purpose of review and enhancement, are provided to staff at the following links:

- National Student Survey – [NSS](#)
- UK Engagement Survey – [UKES](#)
- Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey – [PTES](#)
- Postgraduate Research Experience Survey – [PRES](#)

Student Voice academic feedback loop - best practice expectations

Feedback process

The best way to complete the feedback loop, with regards to student feedback, is through a sequential process:

- Gather Feedback
- Respond to the collated feedback
- Discuss the feedback (and response to it) with the current/next cohort

Feedback points

However, the best way to elicit the full value of the student voice from feedback is by discussing the outputs from each method at the following points:

- The start of delivery with the new cohort (all feedback including surveys)
- During the delivery, as a two-way constructive conversation (commonly Student Voice Meetings)
- The end of the module, but before it's finished (commonly MEQs)

Notably, at the start of the next academic year or module (as appropriate) the previous feedback areas that relate to the course should be highlighted to students. This allows students to then provide further feedback on areas that may have changed or have been introduced in order to further develop areas of the program or module.

Continuous Monitoring of Enhancement (CME)

Finally, there is the continuous and consistent use of all forms of student feedback and voice through the CME action planning process. Any actions that come about due to outcomes should also be included in CME action plans to allow changes to be tracked and further developed over time. The discussion of the CME action plans at Student Voice Meetings will also allow for further student input into these longer-term changes to the course. In this aspect, we expect to see the inclusion of not only the creation of items for action (from student feedback), but also the intended actions (from the responses to student feedback) and the eventual enhancements/outcomes (enacted responses should also be fed back to students). The expectation is that CME action plans will be discussed through Student Voice Meetings as a minimum, but ultimately actions that have informed enhancement of the student experience should be fed back to the wider student cohort through the closing of the loop as well.

Practical application

If we consider a practical application of the above, each of the core feedback methods has the following checkpoints and markers:

Institutional student experience surveys

- a) Level of feedback: Institutional, subject area, department, programme (where available).
- b) Time feedback collected: Annually January-April; results available July/August.
- c) How response should be presented to students: CME; written and/or verbal summary as appropriate; use of data to inform discussions with cohorts as appropriate.
- d) When response should be made available: Beginning of the academic year during induction or re-induction; revisit as appropriate prior to subsequent survey period.

Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQs)

- a) Level of feedback: Module.
- b) Time feedback collected: Halfway to two-thirds of the way through a module - as a minimum early enough to provide feedback to the cohort before the module finishes.
- c) How response should be presented to students: written summary to be made available through Moodle (and Teams if appropriate); verbal summary as relevant to cohort and delivery schedule; CME.
- d) When response should be made available: Before the end of the module; written and/or verbal summary of previous year's feedback and response at the start of the module delivery.

Student Voice Meetings

- a) Level of feedback: department, programme, module (where available and as appropriate).
- b) Time feedback collected: Once per term (as per QSM Handbook J guidance).
- c) How response should be presented to students: minutes posted to Moodle or departmental/programme website; verbal summary as relevant to subsequent Student Voice Meetings; CME.
- d) When response should be made available: minutes available no later than two weeks after the meeting.

Responding to feedback

A written summary response is expected to be produced and placed on the appropriate Moodle site where it is accessible to all students on the module. This document should include the key themes highlighted in any qualitative data collected, and graphs or tables showing the quantitative data if useful and appropriate. Any changes that have been made as a response to the feedback should also be included.

The suggested best way to post through Moodle is to create a specific “response to feedback” tile or link within the course page where all subsequent feedback and responses can be added. This can then allow students and staff the opportunity provide a consistent space for students to look across Moodle pages and also allow initial population of the tile/link with previous feedback/responses to compare results and outcomes.

If the feedback level and process suits use of a programme or departmental platform (e.g. departmental website) then this is obviously an advisable place to also circulate.

It is important that this response is provided as soon as possible after the feedback is received to the students who provided it – thus students can see that their voices have been listened to, acted upon and/or considered, and provides an opportunity to show them how the Student Voice is enhancing the provision for the future.

Feedback reports and/or summaries should also be made accessible to the appropriate External Examiners.

For further information and guidance for staff please contact enhancement@chester.ac.uk