

ACADEMIC QUALITY HANDBOOK

SECTION 5

STUDENT GUIDANCE AND LEARNER SUPPORT

This Section of the Academic Quality Handbook should be of general interest to all students, and of particular interest to staff involved in the provision of support to students.

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5.1 Student Life

5.1.1 The Directorate of Student Life aims to provide appropriate services to students which will support their physical, psychological, emotional and professional needs throughout their University life, thus optimising their student experience and enabling them to realise their full potential. The Directorate consisted of 4 areas: Careers Service, Campus Services, The Sport & Exercise Team, and Student Support. The Directorate has recently been expanded to include the services provided by The Chaplain and the Chaplaincy Centre along with the InfoHub and Student Recruitment and Admissions. Each of these areas previously worked independently to service the needs of students (and staff). These distinct areas were brought together under the umbrella of Student Life to enhance, through mutual support and in collaboration with the Students' Association, the provision already in place. More information on each area is provided elsewhere in this Handbook.

5.2 Student Support

5.2.1 The University recognises that a well-developed system of student support is vital to students' ability to gain the best from their studies. A comprehensive range of student support services is provided, brief details of which are given below. The University's home Web pages carry up-to-date information at: www.abdn.ac.uk/central/students/

5.2.2 The Head of Student Support acts as line-manager for a range of support services, including: University Counselling Service, the Student Advice and Support Office and the Community Liaison Officer who, with a team of Student Resident Assistants, provides support for students in University-managed accommodation. The Student Advice and Support Office include the Student Support Advisers, International Student Advisers Disability Advisers.

5.2.3 Student Support staff liaise with members of the academic staff, with office-bearers of the Students' Association and with representatives of relevant outside organisations. Student complaints on non-academic matters are received by the Head of Student Support.

5.2.4 Feedback from the student body regarding the University's support services is obtained via the student representatives on the Student Affairs Committee. Individual service areas conduct surveys of users' views and aspects of Student Support are included in the Student Barometer and International Student Barometer surveys.

5.3 Academic and Personal Support

5.3.1 The Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committees remits include responsibility for the maintenance of an appropriate system of student academic and personal support for their respective cohorts.

5.4 Undergraduate Students

Advisers of Studies and Personal and Professional Advisers (PPAs)

- 5.4.1 The cornerstone to the University's support services for undergraduate students is the allocation of each student to an Adviser of Studies (or Regent in the case of medical students and students in the School of Education who have Personal and Professional Advisers (PPA)). The *Advisers of Studies Job Description* is provided in Appendix 5.1.
- 5.4.2 Responsibility for the advising system and the day-to-day student administration for each Area of Study are undertaken by the Registry...
- 5.4.3 All students have a meeting with their Adviser (or PPA) at the beginning of the session to have their curriculum approved. Details of these appointments are provided to students during the summer vacation in their Student Portal (or in the case of new students in their Joining Instructions) ([Section 6 refers](#)).
- 5.4.4 Advisers (or PPAs) are expected not only to give curricular advice but also to be available to give guidance to students on other issues they may wish to raise, referring them to more specialist agencies where this seems appropriate. Advisers are also provided with a handbook, which contains an explanation of degree regulations, University policies and procedures, information and contact numbers for the specialist support agencies: accommodation, careers, chaplaincies, financial and grants problems, health, language tuition (including English for overseas students), legal advice, the SA, student welfare, etc. and, in some Areas of Study, subject specific information.
- 5.4.5 Advisers (or PPAs) are informed by the Registry if any of their advisees are "at risk" of failing to satisfy the end-of-year progress requirements as a consequence of their performance in the first half-session examinations. Students "at risk" are asked to meet their Adviser in February/March to discuss their position.

Regents

- 5.4.6 In Medicine, a Regent system operates to provide non-academic support for undergraduate medical students. A job description for the role of Regent is available from the College of Life Sciences & Medicine Office.

Personal Tutors

- 5.4.7 With effect from September 2013, the University will introduce a system of **Personal Tutors** for all undergraduate students. The Personal Tutor system will provide general support to students in matters such as achievement of the Graduate Attributes, Employability, Co-curricular opportunities and feedback as well as a pastoral support role. All members of academic staff will undertake a role as a personal tutor. Further information about the Personal Tutor Scheme is available at www.abdn.ac.uk/personaltutors

5.5 Supervisors of Postgraduate Students

- 5.5.1 Since most postgraduate students are based predominantly in a single School, all postgraduate students, whether they are following a taught programme of study or are registered for a research degree, are assigned a supervisor by their parent School, who is responsible for providing guidance and learner support. Further details are provided in [Section 8](#).

5.6 Codes of Practice

5.6.1 The responsibilities of the teaching staff, Heads of School, and supervisors of research students, *and also the responsibilities of students*, are outlined in three *Codes of Practice* which are appended:-

Appendix 5.2: [Code of Practice on Undergraduate Teaching](#)

Appendix 5.3: [Code of Practice: Postgraduate Taught Students](#)

Appendix 5.4: [Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Students](#)

5.7 Communication with Students

5.7.1 Students receive a University e-mail account as part of the University's e-registration process. Students are advised, on admission, that the University will normally use e-mail to communicate during term-time. They are informed that it is their responsibility to check their e-mail on a regular basis and to ensure regular housekeeping of their e-mail inbox. Students are informed that failure to check their e-mail or failure to receive e-mail due to being over quota or due to non-delivery of an e-mail forwarded to a non-University e-mail account will not be accepted as a ground for appeal (see section 5.23).

5.7.2 When students complete e-registration, they also gain access to their Student Portal. This enables them to:-

- access their academic record including course enrolments, qualifications and prizes
- update their personal details (including address details)
- see details of their Teaching and Examination Timetables
- access their examination results
- apply for August re-assessments (resits)
- see details of books they have on loan from the Library
- view their Finance account with the University
- read important messages relayed to them via the Message Board

5.8 Support for Students in University-managed Accommodation

5.8.1 Starting University is an exciting experience, meeting new people, new friends, and the first taste of living independently. The University has around 2,300 spaces to offer first-time students including both under and postgraduate study. There is a wide range of accommodation available including self-catered and catered; both options have shared and ensuite facilities on offer. The University guarantees a place in Halls for all first time students whose applications are received by the published closing date

5.8.2 All students in University-managed properties have access to a team of Student Resident Assistants, which is managed by the Community Liaison Officer. The Student Resident Assistants are trained on issues such as conflict resolution, health and safety, drugs

awareness and mental health issues. They offer initial support to residents on a variety of issues and can point students in the direction of appropriate professional help. They organise events on site to help residents settle into University life and foster a sense of community. They also deal with discipline and can help residents resolve flat and other interpersonal disputes.

5.8.3 Further details of student accommodation is available at www.abdn.ac.uk/accommodation

5.9 The Students' Association (AUSA)

5.9.1 The student voice is an important element in developing our welfare services and the Students' Association makes a vital contribution to policy and practice in this area. Altogether there are six sabbatical officers: Students are given leave from their studies to look after students' interests or, more commonly taking up office after graduation. The Students' Association will act on any student's behalf on academic matters such as academic appeals, complaints and discipline, and may accompany students to disciplinary appeal hearings if asked. Further details on the activity of the Students' Association can be accessed via their Web pages¹.

5.9.2 Under the terms of the Education Act 1994, students may exercise the right not to be a member of the Students' Association as set out in paragraph 22(2)(c) of the Act (see [Appendix 5.24](#)). Students wishing to exercise this right should contact the Assistant Registrar (Student Information Systems) for further information.

5.10 Student Advice and Support Office

5.10.1 As part of the Student Advice & Support Office, the Student Support Advisers provide free, confidential and independent advice about problems with grants, finance, housing, legal issues, University procedures, benefits, etc., while the Disability Advisers and the International Student Advisers provide relevant support (the latter, particularly on immigration).

5.11 School Conveners, Postgraduate Conveners and Class Representatives

5.1.1 The University operates a system of *Class Representatives*, which is co-ordinated by the AUSA. They are nominated by the students, and generally one class representative is identified for each course at undergraduate level and at least one for each programme at postgraduate level.

5.11.2 Class representatives are the main point of contact between the student body and the academic staff with respect to a particular course, and will be members of the relevant School Staff-Student Liaison Committee. Training for class representatives is provided by the Students' Association in liaison with the national Student Participation in Quality Scotland (SPARQS) service.

5.11.3 The Students' Association Education Committee comprises undergraduate School Conveners and Postgraduate Conveners who acts as a conduit between class representatives and the Students' Association. They also represent the student body at Senate.

¹ <http://www.ausa.org.uk>

5.12 Disabled Students

- 5.12.1 The University welcomes disabled students, including students with long term medical conditions and specific learning differences, and is committed to improving access to its courses, facilities, buildings and social life. It is University policy to consider applications from disabled students on the same grounds as apply to all candidates. The University's Disabilities Advisers are located in the Student Advice and Support Office.
- 5.12.2 It is also policy to take specific disabilities, including specific learning differences, into account when making arrangements for teaching and learning, and the assessment of a student's performance. The onus is on a student to notify the University of their requirements, at the earliest opportunity. Each School has a School Disability Co-ordinator, who is responsible for ensuring that arrangements for students studying in their School are implemented.
- 5.12.3 Details on arrangements for disabled students can be found in the *Undergraduate and Postgraduate Prospectuses*, and in the University's *Information for disabled students and those with specific learning difficulties and medical conditions* ([Appendix 5.5](#)), which takes account of the requirements of the Equalities Act. Prospective students are welcome to contact a Disability Adviser at any time for informal discussion.
- 5.12.4 The following documents have been produced to assist disabled students and those responsible for admissions and examination arrangements:-
- Appendix 5.5: [Information for Disabled Students and those with Specific Learning Differences and Medical Conditions](#)
- Appendix 5.6: [Policy on permitting disabled students to tape-record lectures](#)
- Appendix 5.7: [Flow Chart on procedures for disabled students](#)
- Appendix 5.8: [Procedures for Disabled Students](#)
- Appendix 5.9: [Recommendations Concerning Students with Dyslexia](#)
- 5.12.5 Examination arrangements for disabled candidates are summarised in [Section 7](#)

5.13 University Sport and Exercise Team

- 5.13.1 The University's Sport and Exercise Team consists of highly qualified and experienced staff, including sports scientists and physical education teachers who provide excellent sporting and health & fitness-related services for students. The team provides first-class delivery of exercise classes, from Pilates through to specialist sports conditioning, for all levels of participant. The team also boasts a diverse range of sporting expertise, including Strength and Conditioning (coaching for the Scottish and local area Institutes of Sport), extensive experience in coaching a variety of sports from recreational to elite level, and delivery within the sports related degree programmes. The team also works closely with student sports clubs and the AUSA's Sports Union.
- 5.13.2 Aberdeen Sports Village is our £28 million flagship sports facility, delivered in partnership with Aberdeen City Council and supported by **sportscotland**. These first-class sports facilities, backed up with an array of excellent services, provide the ideal venue for a range of activities, available to all students, at all levels.

Facilities in the Sports Village include:

- Full size indoor football pitch
- Indoor athletics area (135m running straight with throwing and jumping areas)
- Large sports hall
- 4 squash courts (2 glass backed)
- Large fitness suite and performance gymnasium
- 2 studios
- 400 metre indoor athletics track and stadium
- Floodlit water based hockey pitch
- Performance and Wellbeing Centre (with physiotherapy clinic)
- Crèche, café and spectator seating

5.13.3 The new multi-million pound Aquatics Centre, set to open in early 2014, will offer a wealth of opportunities for students to take part in a wide range of aquatic sports and activities including swimming, diving, synchronised swimming & aqua aerobics. The world-class facilities will include:

- 10 lane - 50m training and competition pool
- Dividing boom allowing the pool to be split into two discrete pools
- 25m x 16.5m Diving Pool with springboards and diving platforms utilising the latest technology in cushioning systems
- Floating Floor technology in whole of diving pool and one quarter of 50m pool
- Competitor Seating and Spectator seating for 600
- Full Timing/Video Analysis lab
- Land Conditioning Area
- Health Suite
- Bridge connection to Aberdeen Sports Village

5.13.4 Other available facilities currently include: King's Pavilion and Playing Fields – the King's Pavilion contains a swimming pool and changing facilities. The attractive outdoor playing fields boast two rugby pitches, a lacrosse pitch, an artificial cricket wicket, as well as a single tennis court and three additional courts which double as a floodlit training area during winter: Balgownie Playing Fields (situated two miles from the King's campus in the Bridge of Don) play host to football and shinty teams, providing extensive pitches and changing rooms: Hillhead Centre (situated appropriate one mile from King's Campus next to Hillhead Halls of Residence) has an exclusive stadium grass football pitch, full-sized sand-dressed synthetic pitch and an impressive sports pavilion: Boathouse on the banks of the River Dee which serves the thriving rowing club: Climbing bothy in Royal Deeside.

5.14 The Rocking Horse Nursery

5.14.1 The aim of the Rocking Horse Nursery is to provide nursery facilities for the children of staff and students. It operates on a non-profit, cost-covering basis. There are currently 47 full and part-time places for children aged 0-5 and places are split approximately half and half between the children of staff and students. The Nursery is supervised by professional, qualified staff, who report to a Board of Trustees which includes within its membership the President of the Students' Association. The Nursery's telephone extension is 3400. Plans are well developed for the creation of a new, larger Campus Based Nursery under the same operational style as the existing facility.

5.15 The Chaplaincy

5.15.1 The University Chaplaincy Centre, located at 25 High Street, serves people of all faiths and none. The Chaplain and Assistant Chaplains are committed to serving the whole University community, irrespective of individual religious outlook. They are available to meet with students experiencing difficulties or to visit students who have been admitted to hospital. Hospitality, community, and inter-faith dialogue are actively encouraged. The Chaplaincy coordinates a café in Hillhead Halls of Residence, offers room bookings for student groups and can provide information about local and national faith communities. There are Honorary Chaplains of different denominations and staff faith representatives from various faiths appointed to serve the interests of our students. The University's ancient Chapel is at the heart of the campus and, during term time, various services and concerts are held. Prayer rooms are provided for Muslim students on both the King's and Foresterhill sites and a Mosque is located near King's College on the Spital. The Catholic Diocese supports RC students from its Chaplaincy on the High Street.

5.16 The University Counselling Service

5.16.1 The Counselling Service provides counselling for students and staff and runs workshops on topics such as Assertiveness, Relaxation, and Coping with Exams, which are free and open to any student.

5.17 Careers Service

5.17.1 The Careers Service is located on the 2nd floor of the Hub in Elphinstone Road (extension 3601) and provides a wide range of services to under- and postgraduates, graduates, prospective students, staff, employers and the academic community.

5.17.2 The Careers Service supports students and graduates in **exploring their options** through careers education, information and guidance services.

- Guidance services can be accessed through short duty interactions, longer guidance appointments and an online Virtual Adviser service. Queries can range from discussions about career planning or postgraduate study options to practical help with applications and interviews.
- Access to a wide range of resources to inform students' and graduates' career choices is provided through our library in the Hub and a comprehensive and searchable Virtual Library with links to over 2500 resources.
- In addition to the Careers Service's own 15-credit level II course ED2550 – Find Your Direction, careers staff also contribute to many other credit-bearing courses as well as delivering workshops and talks through academic disciplines. To ensure that all students have access to careers education, online courses are available through MyAberdeen.

5.17.3 The Service is involved in a wide range of co-curricular initiatives which help students to **develop their skills** and Aberdeen Graduate Attributes. Many of these co-curricular achievements are also recognised on the graduate transcript.

- The STAR (Students Taking Active Roles) Award offers students recognition for their contribution to activities such as Students' Association club and society roles or involvement as Careers Subject Representatives.
- The Career Mentoring Programme supports students in developing their careers ideas by matching them with professionals who are willing to share their experience and expertise.
- The Careers Service sources and supports work placements, including the award-winning Aberdeen Internship, and offers other work-related learning opportunities, for example through the BP Student Tutoring Scheme which places students in local primary and secondary schools.
- The Careers Service contributes to and promotes opportunities which allow students to become involved in Enterprise and Entrepreneurship, particularly through organisations such as the Scottish Institute for Enterprise and the Aberdeen Business Enterprise Society.

5.17.4 The Careers Service enables students to **connect with employers** from a wide range of sectors through:

- Organising a wide range of events such as fairs and employer presentations.
- Posting the latest graduate jobs, placements and internships on our website.
- Facilitating employer-led skills workshops which can range from advice on applications to developing commercial awareness.

5.17.5 The Careers Service works closely with the academic community. In particular, the Careers Service is represented on and provides information, for example on the Destinations of Leavers, to the Programme Advisory Boards (or equivalent employer liaison groups). Careers Advisers also liaise closely with academic colleagues to be able to provide the best possible support to students in specific academic disciplines and, more widely, through providing support and appropriate information to Personal Tutors.

5.17.6 Maintaining excellent relationships with a wide range of employers of all sizes and from many different sectors underpins and informs the work of the Careers Service. In addition to providing advice on the recruitment of our students and graduates and advertising vacancies, the Service also seeks employer opinions and encourages involvement through the Careers Service Employer Board, to which all Programme Advisory Boards and other employer liaison groups report, and through various Careers Service activities such as the STAR Award and Career Mentoring Programme. The Careers Service's Employer Engagement Coordinator supports and initiates much of our work with employers.

5.18 The Infohub

5.18.1 The Infohub is the first point of call for all student services, information and enquiries. The Infohub is staffed by a team of friendly and experienced individuals who will make every effort to answer your questions. As well as providing information on most student related issues, the Infohub staff can check your registration status, prepare student letters, including bank and council tax letters, provide directions, issue ID cards, and set up payment plans for tuition and accommodation as well as taking payment. Students can also get information on IT support, accommodation, personal tutoring and peer mentoring as well as access to

Registry Officers, Student Support and the Careers Department. All these services are located in The Hub on the ground floor of The Hub.

5.19 The Registry

- 5.19.1 The Registry is in day-to-day contact with students and provides a range of advice and information in regard to student loans and tuition fees, financial assistance, progress, examinations, awards and degree regulations, graduation and appeals procedures. Staff may also refer students to other support services.
- 5.19.2 Details of various aspects of student academic administration undertaken by the Registry are provided in [Section 6](#), [Section 7](#), [Section 8](#). The main responsibilities of the Section's various offices are summarised in [Section 11](#). Further details of the services and facilities can be accessed via the Registry's Web pages².

5.20 Student Learning Service

- 5.20.1 The Student Learning Service (SLS) works with students at all levels of undergraduate and postgraduate study to enhance their learning strategies. Specialist Advisers in Dyslexia and other learning differences, maths and academic writing are available. SLS offers workshops, individual study advice sessions and tailored in-course workshops in collaboration with academic staff. Topics include: academic writing, critical thinking, presentation skills, and time-management and exam preparation. SLS also offers a range of online study resources for students.

5.21 English Language Support

- 5.21.1 All non-native English-speaking students are welcome to consult a member of the English Language team in the Language Centre. English language-related enquiries are also welcome from members of the academic and administrative staff.
- 5.21.2 Courses/workshops/tutorials are run throughout the academic year on academic writing and communication skills.
- 5.21.3 A level 2 module (15 credits) "English as an International Language: Communication Skills for Study and Professional Development" is offered in the first semester for undergraduate students whose first language is not English and aims to develop communicative ability in line with ALTE level 4 (competent user). The minimum entry level is the equivalent of IELTS 6.00.
- 5.21.4 In addition, the Language Centre offers a range of classes including IELTS preparation classes and general English programmes.

5.22 Information Technology and Library

- 5.22.1 IT Services is responsible for the provision of information and communication services within the University.

² www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/registry-972.php

- 5.22.2 The Directorate of Library Special Collections and Museums is responsible for the provision of Library services within the University.
- 5.22.3 Further information on the services are detailed in [Section 11](#), which includes details of the various Help and Information desks, as well as who to contact concerning the services offered.

5.23 Appeals/Complaints/Student Discipline

- 5.23.1 Full details on students' progress and academic appeals, and complaints and student discipline are provided in [Section 6](#) [sub-sections 6.13 and 6.14, respectively]. The following appendices refer:-

Appendix 5.15a:	<i>Code of Practice on Student Discipline(Academic)</i>
Appendix 5.15b:	<i>Code of Practice on Student Discipline(Non-Academic)</i>
Appendix 5.16	<i>Procedure for Dealing with Allegations of Plagiarism against Graduates of the University</i>
Appendix 5.17a:	<i>Policy on Undergraduate Student Progress</i>
Appendix 5.17e:	<i>Guidance Notes on Undergraduate Student Progress</i>
Appendix 5.18a:	<i>Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals</i>
Appendix 5.18c:	<i>Form for Appeals and Complaints</i>
Appendix 5.19:	<i>Complaints Handling Procedure</i>
Appendix 5.20:	<i>Status of Students Pending the Outcome of Consideration of (a) an Academic Appeal or Complaint; (b) Undergraduate Student Progress, or Fitness to Practice</i>
Appendix 5.21:	<i>The Payment of Expenses Incurred by a Successful Appellant or Complainant: Guidance Note</i>
Appendix 5.26:	<i>Policy on Drugs and Alcohol Misuse (Students)</i>

5.24 Making Your Opinions Known (including non-academic complaints)

- 5.24.1 Universities cherish freedom of speech and the responsible expression of all opinions. There are many formal and informal channels of communication within the University through which students can make their views known to academic staff and to the University authorities. AUSA represents the interests of students on University decision-making bodies, and will advise individuals how best to make their views heard if informal approaches seem not to have worked. Students also elect the Rector every three years. He or she holds one of the most senior positions in the University, chairs the University Court, and has a special responsibility to look after student interests. The Rector or his/her Assessor (representative) can be contacted through the Students' Association. Regular surgeries are normally held during term-time.
- 5.24.2 The University recognises that there may be occasions when a student, graduate, applicant or member of the public feels that the level of service or treatment they have received from the University falls short of what might be reasonably expected. The University's [*Complaints Handling Procedure*](#) (CHP) reflects the University's commitment to valuing complaints. The University's aim is to resolve issues of dissatisfaction as close to the initial point of contact as possible and to conduct thorough and fair investigations of complaints so that, where appropriate, evidence-based decisions on the facts of each individual case can be made.