Student contact with teaching staff

Scope
Policy setting out expectations concerning what students can expect from interaction with academic staff beyond formal learning opportunities including personal tutoring, academic tutorials and responses to queries.

Date approved/re-approved
11th August 2008
Updated minor amendments October 2012

Date for review
To be reviewed on a periodic basis, with allowance for minor annual updates of roles and responsibilities by Education and Student Committee, as required

To be read in conjunction with Section 4 of the Quality Manual and the Assessment and Feedback Policy in Section 6 of the Quality Manual
Policy on Student Contact with Teaching Staff

Context

The Learning and Teaching Strategy supports our students in becoming professional, analytical and enquiring graduates. Students’ development is dependent on the support they receive, the environment in which they study, and the academic quality of their programmes; students’ own motivation to learn provides an additional essential factor.

Beyond scheduled teaching, all students should be provided with clear information on the opportunities available for interaction with academic staff. Staff also need to have established structures that enable them to manage communications with students effectively so that expectations of both parties are clear. Personal Tutoring and Academic Tutorials provide two formal ways in which students receive support. However, from time-to-time, students may have ad-hoc queries which may be discipline-specific or relate to their wider educational or personal experience.

Where programmes are delivered in partnership, a policy on student contact should be in place which is subject to the approval of the University; this should be in line with the principles within this policy.

Meetings with Academic Staff

During each teaching week of the Academic Year, all academic staff who have a responsibility for teaching, in its broadest sense, and/or personal tutoring should be available for a time that totals at least two ‘office-hours’ to provide students with clear opportunities in which ad-hoc meetings can be held. This time is a minimum and separate to personal or academic-related tutorials. These opportunities operate on the following principles:

- Students will be advised via programme handbooks and induction about this type of support and how they should liaise with staff on setting-up a time to meet.

- Staff availability will be published in a form that will be most accessible to students on a particular programme. This may include publication via Cityspace, a departmental webpage, a notice on a staff door or an additional line in the signature of a staff email.

- Where appropriate, an office hour time may be virtual. This may be particularly relevant where students are studying via distance-learning, in partnership with another organisation or are part-time.

- Staff should use their judgement in instances where a student may require further time beyond the office hour slot and schedule this accordingly.

- Where visiting staff are not available, the Head of Department must ensure that other relevant academic staff will be accessible to students to answer specific queries. Arrangements must be made clear to students at the start of a module.

Responses to Student Queries

Students will be advised of academic staff email addresses through programme handbooks and academic staff will be advised of students’ email addresses through the programme administrator, following registration. Liaison between staff and students will operate on the following principles:
- Academic staff will respond to students’ emails and telephone messages in a timely manner. It is expected, for example, that where a query is straightforward and where the member of staff is not away, a response within two working days would normally be reasonable.

- Where the nature of the query means that it is not possible to provide the student with a full response, the issue should be acknowledged and information provided as to how and when the issue will be responded to and by whom.

- Where it is immediately apparent that the nature of the query means that a face-to-face discussion would be more appropriate, and where it is not an emergency, the student may be referred to an office-hour meeting.

- Unless agreed otherwise, these principles will not normally apply to emails from students asking for a detailed response on draft submissions or feedback on formal assessments. This process will be managed in line with the University Assessment and Feedback Policy.

- Where a member of staff is absent from the University, an out-of-office message should be provided which will normally provide details of alternative contact for queries that are an emergency.

- Where academic staff choose to provide students with their mobile phone number and/or use text-messaging as a formal communication mechanism, they have a responsibility to ensure that responses are timely and in accordance with the principles above.

- If visiting staff are not able to comply with these principles due to other commitments, the Head of Department must ensure that other relevant academic staff will be accessible to students to answer specific queries. Arrangements must be made clear to students at the start of a module.

- Social networking sites will not normally be a media used for formal communication with students on matters relating to their academic progress.