School of Computer Science  
Student Support Policy

1 Preamble

Procedures for student support in the School of Computer Science are based on the following principles:

1. To concentrate support at those junctures which are most critical to students’ success in their programme of study.¹
2. To provide mechanisms for support with unforeseen difficulties.
3. To instil in students an awareness that they are expected to take responsibility for their own learning and career development.²
4. To provide competent and reliable help through staff who specialise in particular aspects of student support, rather than expect all staff to be experts for all situations.
5. To inform and remind students of the mechanisms available.
6. To adapt and review these procedures in the light of experience and demands from stakeholders.³

2 Tutorial arrangements⁴

The School of Computer Science distinguishes between Personal Academic Advisors, Progress Advisors, and Welfare Tutors. The roles are defined more precisely below but at this point they can be summarised as follows: Personal Academic Advisors help with settling in and are the first points of contact for all matters of academic development and guidance; Progress Advisors return year marks and advise students on their options for re-assessment; Welfare Tutors deal with pastoral matters (such as illness and personal distress) that may impact negatively on a student’s academic performance.

2.1 Personal Academic Advisors

On first registering with the School, all students are assigned to a permanent member of teaching staff as their Personal Academic Advisor. The relationship remains in place during the whole of the student’s time on their programme of study. The following special cases apply:

1. A student may ask to be assigned to a different advisor. Any such request should be directed to the Head of Student Development and Support.
2. A member of staff may be unable to discharge his or her advisor duties during a sabbatical. In these or similar cases, the Head of Student Development and Support assumes those duties.
3. When a member of staff leaves the School, his or her advisorial duties are transferred to another member of staff.
4. The School expects that for final year undergraduate students, the Project Supervisor mostly fulfils the role of the Personal Academic Advisor, though a student still has access to the advisor he or she was originally assigned to.

¹ Rather than spreading out tutorial meetings at equal intervals throughout the year.
² This is taken from the University CoP.
³ By this is meant not only students but also staff, the University, and Government (via HEFCE, QAA, etc).
⁴ The section headings correspond directly to the “Minimum Requirements for Student Development and Support” in the Code of Practice.
Joint-honours students are treated like single-honours students, that is, they too are assigned to a Personal Academic Advisor in the School of Computer Science.

Personal Academic Advisors have the following duties:

1. To hold advisorial sessions as prescribed by the School for the various degree programmes.

2. To offer a timetabled office hour each week during term time, and inform students how they can be contacted at other times. This information must be available on the Advisor’s office door and via the staff web pages.

3. To respond to e-mail requests for a meeting from one of their advisees within two working days (unless on travel and without e-mail access).

4. To be aware of relevant University codes of practice, and attend training sessions as appropriate.

5. To be aware of relevant University central services.

6. To be aware of the appropriate course of action in the case of advisees’ problems, and especially, to refer students to:
   • the module provider in the case of difficulties with a particular module
   • the student representative in cases of persistent difficulties with a module provider
   • the Programme Director responsible in cases of uncertainty with regulations and chosen programmes of study
   • the Welfare Team in the case of personal difficulties
   • the Welfare Team when it appears that a student’s difficulties could be considered “mitigating circumstances” by the exam board
   • the appropriate University central service e.g. for careers advice, skills development, or difficulties with understanding and speaking English
   • the Director of Undergraduate Studies or Postgraduate Studies as appropriate for advice on how to change their degree programme.

Cases of conflict between a student and the Personal Academic Advisor should be brought to the attention of the Head of Student Development and Support.

2.2 Advice regarding achievement and development

The School provides the following scheduled meetings to advise students on their progress.

1. First-year undergraduate students are required to attend a one-to-one meeting with their Personal Academic Advisor in Week 6 of Semester 1. The purpose of this meeting is to review the student’s performance in the weekly assessed exercise classes, so as to find out how well they have settled in into the course, and to suggest appropriate corrective action where necessary.

2. All students receive their year marks from a Progress Advisor (usually different from the Personal Academic Advisor) in a one-to-one meeting on the last day of the summer term. The purpose of this meeting is to explain the exam board’s recommendation to the student, and especially to explain any requirements for re-sitting an examination.

3. Second-year students (and third-year students on four-year programmes) meet with their Personal Academic Advisor in the first week of Semester 1. At this point the focus of the discussion is on the results from any resits the student may have been asked to take, and to set individual targets for the year ahead. Students are reminded that all marks in the second year count towards their final degree classification.
2.3 Welfare support

The School has a Welfare Support Team, led by the Welfare Tutor, that deals with all pastoral issues. The Welfare Support Team offer a special Welfare Office Hour on each day during the academic year, and can also be contacted via a dedicated email address (welfare@cs.bham.ac.uk).

The Welfare Team provides support in the following ways:

1. It is the first point of contact for all pastoral matters, such as illness and personal distress.
2. It reviews the reasons for absences and decides whether a student should be granted a deadline extension for any affected coursework.
3. It receives and reviews all claims of mitigating circumstances.
4. It advises the Mitigation Board of any mitigating circumstances.
5. It deals with the arrangements necessary for any student with special educational needs.
6. It refers students with serious personal problems to professional services, such as the University’s Student Support and Counselling Service.

2.4 First-year advisorials

First-year undergraduate students see their Personal Academic Advisor in a timetabled advisorial in each week of Semester 1. The purpose of these meetings is to help students settle into university life, scholarly routines, and their programme of study. They provide additional help with first-year modules, especially by setting the material into the wider context of Computer Science. Attendance at the advisorials is monitored by the Senior Tutor.

2.5 Arrangements for postgraduate students

Taught postgraduate students also have Personal Academic Advisors, and have scheduled meetings with them. The content of these meetings is tailored to the particular needs of students on each postgraduate programme.

2.6 Key personnel

- The Head of Student Development and Support oversees the tutorial arrangements in the School as described in this document. He or she is responsible for updating the Student Handbook at least once each year.
- The Senior Tutor monitors students’ attendance and follows up cases of lack of reasonable diligence.
- The Welfare Tutor leads the Welfare Support Team.
- The Head of Student Development & Support leads the Progress Advice Team. He or she is responsible for the Induction process for new undergraduate students.

3 Academic feedback

Students receive feedback on continuously assessed work from the module provider. This can be in the form of comments on written work, an email to all students, or reviews in class.

The School aims to return all assessed work no later than two weeks after the deadline. Where this timetable cannot be met, assessors inform the students in an appropriate manner of when they can expect their work back.

Feedback and advice on exam performance is provided by the Progress Advice Team as described above.
4 Careers and skills development

Students are given advice on available support services relating to careers during Induction Week and via the Student Handbook. In addition, the School has a designated Careers Tutor who acts as a link between students and the University’s Careers Service. Career awareness is an essential part of Computer Science education and is deeply embedded within the curriculum. Final year undergraduate and postgraduate students further benefit from the module Commercial Programming that is taught exclusively by external lecturers from industry.

As part of the Induction process, students are reminded of the importance of study skills and the development of other personal skills if they are to succeed with their course and their careers. The weekly advisorials described above are an opportunity to reinforce this message. Personal skills are embedded in profession-based exercises and assessments, for example:

- presentation skills are one of the topics in the module Communication Skills and Professional Issues, and are also developed in the weekly vivas in the first-year programming workshop;
- collaborative skills are a topic in the module Software Engineering and practiced in the Team project;
- numerical and problem solving skills are a foundation for most technical topics in the curriculum;
- many modules emphasise the way in which certain technical and interpersonal skills relate to the needs of a successful career in the software industry.

5 Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The Head of Student Development and Support is responsible for reviewing, improving and adapting the Student Support Policy as the changing environment demands. The policy is on the agenda of the Staff Student Consultative Committee and the School Committee at least once every year. A question regarding the quality of academic feedback to students is part of the (bi-termly) module questionnaires.