



Academic Problems



Advice Centre

Manchester Metropolitan Students' Union

99 Oxford Road Manchester

Contact us:

Manchester 0161 247 6533

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Community
Legal Service



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Most students enjoy their time at MMU and complete their studies successfully. But problems can and do occur. This leaflet aims to give you the information you need to resolve any difficulties quickly and effectively.

Your Rights & Responsibilities

Details of what you can expect from the University - and what it expects from you - are published in:

- The University Prospectus.
- Course Handbook
 - attendance requirements - how the course is assessed - opportunities to do resits - the grades you need to go on to the next year.
- Regulations for Undergraduate Programmes of Study
 - rules for assessment, reassessment and progression including to request extra sessions and consideration of personal circumstances.
- Student Regulations and Procedures.
 - MMU's equal opportunities policy, complaints, disciplinary, expulsion and other procedures.
- Correspondence between you and the University, eg. placement details or alterations to the programme.

It is important to be familiar with the contents of these documents and to check the appropriate passages before embarking on discussions, disputes or appeals with the University.

Problems with the course or University staff

Problems Affecting a Number of Students

eg problems with course administration, curriculum, teaching methods

These problems are often best dealt with collectively through student representatives:

- student course and faculty representatives, who may be able to take up group grievances informally with members of staff or raise the matter at course and faculty committees,
- the Vice President Education at the Students' Union.

If the matter cannot be resolved informally, you can make a formal complaint under the University's Complaints Procedure.

Individual Problems

eg relationships with tutors, examiners, supervisors and other students

If you have a problem or grievance which is affecting your studies, think about discussing this in confidence with your personal tutor, another tutor or course leader. Most will be approachable and willing to help you find a constructive solution to the problem.

The Advice Centre is an independent service and can guide you through the issues confidentially and help you decide on a course of action and represent you if you wish.

If your informal approaches fail to resolve the difficulty, you can consider taking action under the University's Complaints Procedure in consultation with the Advice Centre.

Problems affecting your academic work

Students sometimes feel that their studies are being affected by problems outside the course, perhaps relating to personal, family, health or financial difficulties. It is important to tell your department about your difficulties so that your circumstances can be taken into account when your results are considered. The department may also be able to suggest a way of tackling the problems.

Some students find it difficult to approach a member of staff connected with their course. You may find it easier to put the matter in writing to your personal tutor or head of department, or to talk it through with the Advice Centre. We can help you find the option that best suits your needs and help you take action if necessary.

If the difficulties are on-going, or have affected your performance in exams or a piece of assessed work, it is essential to tell the Board of Examiners before it meets to consider your result. Do this on a Disclosure of Exceptional Factors form, which can be obtained from your department office. If possible include supporting evidence such as a letter from your counsellor or doctor. If you do not make the University aware of the problem at an early stage, you will reduce the chances of a successful appeal against a Board of Examiners decision. The Advice Centre can offer independent and impartial advice on how best to inform the department.

Problems with Motivation and Learning

There are various sources of help if you feel that you have a problem with motivation, organising yourself, or with a particular aspect of the course such as essay writing, giving presentations or exam stress.

Your tutor may be able to give advice and guidance, while the Faculty Student Support Officers offer help on an individual and group basis.

Study Skills

It's always worth talking to your subject or year tutor if you feel that you have a weakness in a particular area of study. The Faculty Student Support Officer can also help in a variety of ways;

- one-to-one study support
- study skills workshops
- Leaflets and booklets. Titles include Essay Writing, Referencing, Punctuation and Time Management

Help with the English Language

There are a number of possible options for improving your English language skills:

- Some departments at MMU offer English language support. Talk to your personal tutor or year leader to find out more.
- The International Society offers a range of language courses, including English. You can contact them at William Kay House, 327 Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PG, or check the details of courses on their website at www.internationalsociety.org.uk
- Some colleges in Manchester run English language courses. Learndirect will be able to give you details. Phone them on 0800 100 900 or visit the website at www.learndirect.co.uk

Disability

By law the University must publish a Disability Statement giving details of its policies and provisions for students with disabilities. A copy of the Disability Statement can be obtained from Student Services, your faculty office or the Advice Centre.

Provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act covering Education should now have been incorporated in the Union Procedures. Contact the Advice Centre if you think that you have suffered discrimination because of disability.

Disabled students may qualify for help in the form of:

Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) from the Local Education Authority (LEA).

This is available to full-time and part-time students on undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

The DSA can help with equipment, personal helpers, note takers, extra travel costs, etc.

Modifications to the University's assessment procedures, for instance extra time in exams or assessment by an alternative means, such as oral examination.

Adaptations to University premises, location of lectures, etc. It is essential to discuss your needs with the University as early as possible, preferably before enrolling on the course.

Access to Learning Funds (ALF).

Apply to the University for an award from the Access to Learning Fund if you are in danger of suffering financial hardship.

Welfare benefits – ask the Advice Centre to check your possible entitlement.

The Learning Support Service at Student Services can help you apply for the DSA, implement support and help you identify any disability eg. dyslexia.

Dyslexia

Students who have a current psychologist's assessment confirming dyslexia may qualify for extra help, including:

A Disabled Students Allowance from the LEA to pay for special equipment, enabling technology such as a computer and possibly for extra tuition.

Extra time in exams and assessments, and possibly the opportunity of assessment by an alternative method.

Students who are dyslexic, or think they may be and wish to be assessed can obtain help from the Learning Support Service in Manchester or Crewe & Alsager.

Health Problems

Missing Lectures, Classes, Assessments or Exams Because of Illness

You must follow the University's procedures if you are prevented from attending any part of your course because you are ill.

Absence from Assessments or Exams:

Speak to a tutor or other appropriate person as soon as possible, preferably before the missed assessment or exam, and

Obtain a note signed by a medical practitioner confirming that you were ill on the day of the exam or assessment. Submit this to the University as soon as possible.

If you do not follow this procedure, you risk failing the assessment.

Missing Lectures or Classes:

Absences from 1 to 6 days duration (including non-working days):

Inform your head of department or tutor as soon as possible, and

Submit a completed self-certification form (SSCI), available from your departmental office.

Absences for 7 or more days (including non-working days):

Submit a medical certificate signed by your doctor.

Feeling Unwell During an Exam

Tell the invigilator as soon as you feel unwell, ask your doctor for a medical certificate confirming this, and submit it to your department as soon as possible. Also tell the Board of Examiners that you felt unwell. Do this on a Disclosure of Exceptional Factors form, from your department office and we strongly recommend you contact the Advice Centre before or shortly after doing this.

Sitting an Exam or Assessment when you are Unfit

It is risky to go ahead with sitting an assessment if you know that you are not well, either physically or mentally. If you really do want to take the assessment, talk to your tutor beforehand and get a sick note from your doctor confirming your condition on the date in question.

If you perform badly and raise the question of illness after your results, it may be very difficult to persuade the university to reconsider their award.

Funding While you are Absent Through Illness

If you are absent for up to 60 days, your student loan and any grant should continue to be paid, provided that you have given sick notes to your department. If the illness lasts more than 60 days, both the LEA and Student Loan Company have discretion to continue payments.

In certain circumstances you may be able to claim welfare benefits if you are sick or have deferred attendance because of illness but be warned if you claim whilst ineligible you may be investigated for fraud and have to repay the amount paid in benefits. Contact the Advice Centre for a full benefits check if you think you may be entitled or are unsure of a current claim.

Speak to the Advice Centre if you experience any difficulties with funding when you are ill.

Health Problems Affecting Studies

It is important to talk to your personal tutor, course leader or head of department about any academic problems which arise because of ill health. They may be able to arrange for extensions to coursework deadlines and to suggest possible means of helping you. If you under-performed in assessments because of a medical problem, it is essential to inform the Board of Examiners of the problem before the meeting of the Board. Do this on a Disclosure of Exceptional Factors form which is available from your department office. If possible, include documentary evidence.

If your health problems persist, it may be advisable to defer your attendance until things improve. If you are unable to inform the Department ahead of the Board of Examiners meeting you may submit an academic appeal - consult the Advice Centre as soon as possible and see our booklet on Academic Appeals. Remember there is a limited period of time to do this so don't delay.

Financial Problems

Do seek help as soon as you realise that financial difficulties are affecting your academic work. The Advice Centre can check that you are receiving the correct funding and perhaps work with you to negotiate reduced debt repayments. They can also advise you how to apply for a payment from the University's Access to Learning Fund.

Tell the Board of Examiners if an exceptional financial crisis caused you to perform badly in an assessment, for instance if your home was being repossessed at exam time. Do this on a Disclosure of Exceptional Circumstances form, which can be obtained from your department office.

If it is clear that your financial difficulties will take some time to resolve, it may be worth deferring your attendance at university until matters improve.

Debts to the University

Some students find that they owe money to the University for tuition fees, hall fees, library fines, etc. You need to treat these debts with urgent priority as the University may try to impose sanctions to encourage payment. Contact the Advice Centre if you find yourself in this position.

If you are eligible, apply for an award from the University's Access to Learning Fund, but the rules on the ALF are complicated and the University cannot award you a payment to meet debts owed to them. You may however qualify based on other grounds (eg. you have children). The Advice Centre can assist you with your application. Also write to the University to give details of your income and expenditure and try to explain when you will be able to pay. If possible, try to make some payment, however small, on a regular basis. You should strongly consider making an appointment with the Advice Centre for in depth consultation on the problem.

If the University refuses to release your exam results because you have debts to the University, you can apply to see your marks under the Data Protection Act 1988. Complete an 'Access to Information' form, which is available from your faculty office or the Advice Centre and give it to the University together with a £10 fee. The University must then, by law, send your marks to you within 40 days.

Repeating a Year

If you are repeating a year, you may be able to get your tuition fees and/or a loan paid by your LEA (assuming that you are a UK student and your parents' income is not too high). However there are complicated rules governing repeat study. Please contact the Advice Centre for detailed guidance before committing to any course of action.

If you are repeating a year for the second / third time, the LEA has discretion to fund your fees. You should present a strong case with evidence of the reasons you had to repeat your studies based on what is termed 'compelling personal reasons'. The Advice Centre can help you draft your request.

Your rights to receive a student loan and supplementary allowances are not affected by repeat study, unless you already have a degree.

Deferring Your Studies

Taking time out of the course may be a sensible option if you have health problems, are pregnant or suffering serious personal difficulties. Always talk to the year leader or course leader before you defer, then seek guidance from the Advice Centre on the financial implications.

When you have made a definite decision, write to your Head of Department, the LEA and the Student Loan Company, Student Finance Direct, bank and other relevant organisations to give the date of your deferral and expected date of return.

If you have paid your own tuition fees, you may be entitled to a partial refund when you defer.

Withdrawing from your course / transferring to another course

You may feel that your unhappiness or dissatisfaction with your course is due to a problem which cannot be readily solved, or that the course does not meet your needs or expectations. If this is the case, you may want to consider withdrawing from the course or transferring to another course, either within MMU or at another institution. It is vital that you seek advice quickly if you are considering one of these options.

If you feel able to do so, start by discussing the situation with a course tutor or your personal tutor, the Careers Service and/or Counselling Service. They may be able to suggest courses of action which have not yet been considered, such as changing certain options within the course, taking time out of your studies or doing the course part-time.

Decisions to transfer or withdraw from your course can have important implications for your entitlement to funding. The Advice Centre can explain your rights to you. The rules are complicated and strict time limits apply, so seek advice as soon as possible. Always inform your LEA and the Student Loan Company of your decision in writing.

If you have paid your own tuition fees, you may be entitled to a partial refund when you withdraw. If you have paid them by using the fee loan the situation is a little more complicated, pop into the Advice Centre for a more in depth explanation.

Finding another Course

If you have decided to transfer to another course, find out what courses are available, either at MMU or elsewhere. Prospectuses are available on the Internet, in most reference libraries and careers offices. You can get a copy of the MMU prospectus from campus reception desks or see it online at <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/courses/>

When you have chosen a suitable course, telephone the enquiry number in the prospectus to ask if places are available, whether you meet the entry requirements, and how to apply. Some institutions will expect you to apply through UCAS, whilst others may ask you to complete an internal application form or to attend for an informal chat or an interview.

Problems with Exams and Assessments

Exam Stress

The Learning Support Service produces leaflets on exam revision and study skills. You can also speak to them for further guidance. It may be helpful to consult your doctor or one of the University counsellors if the problem is particularly acute. Also inform the Board of Examiners if you under-performed in exams because of stress. Do this on a Disclosure of Exceptional Factors form from your department office, and try to support your case with medical evidence. The Counselling Service run relaxation workshops entitled 'Stress Management' and 'Blockbuster' to assist around exam time. The focus is on learning to achieve relaxation through the practice of breathing exercises and other techniques widely used in stress management. They also offer a Confidence Building Skills Course covering issues such as assertiveness, handling criticism and relating to others. For further information contact the Counselling Service on 0161 247 3493.

Health Problems affecting Exams and Assessments

See the earlier section on Health Problems.

Personal Problems affecting Exams and Assessments

If you feel that your academic performance has suffered because of problems you have experienced, it is essential to write to the Board of Examiners before their meeting to tell them about your difficulties and how they have affected your assessed work. You can do this by completing of Disclosure of Exceptional Factors form. Read the Guiding Principles for Boards of Examiners before you fill in the form. The form and the Guiding Principles can be obtained at the Advice Centre or your department office.

If you fail to do this, you prejudice your chances of a successful appeal against your result.

Extensions for Coursework

Few students get through university without a crisis affecting getting coursework in on time. If you find yourself in this position, you must get permission if you want to hand your work in late. If you don't, you may fail the assignment altogether or have your marks reduced.

Go to see your subject or year tutor as soon as you realise that there is a problem with meeting the deadline. If you are sick, get a doctor's note and give it to the tutor, who will normally agree to an extension. An extension may also be given if there are other exceptional circumstances. Make sure that you are given written confirmation of the extension and the new deadline. Be aware that the procedure varies across the university, some departments may require you to provide a disclosure of exceptional circumstances form to be allowed an extension.

If you have already missed a deadline without permission you can write to your tutor or Course or Year Leader to explain any special circumstances and to ask to be excused a penalty.

Problems with Resits

Your Right to a Resit or Referral:

Your course regulations (in the course handbook) give details of the circumstances in which resits will be permitted.

Resit Fees:

The University charges a fee for resits. This must be paid before taking the resit. Do your very best to budget for this possible payment. If you cannot raise the money, contact the Advice Centre.

Resit Date Clashing with Another Commitment:

Be aware of the dates of resits when making commitments, particularly when booking holidays in the summer vacation. Your department will not usually be willing to offer an alternative date unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Ongoing Problems Affecting Revision for Resits:

You may have failed the original assessments because of personal or health problems. If these problems have not been resolved, it may be wise to defer the resits, rather than risk a further failure. Seek guidance from your tutor about the possible options.

Obtaining your Marks

It is MMU's policy to allow students to have their assessment marks. You also have this right under the Data Protection Act. You may need to write to your Head of Department to request your marks. If s/he refuses, write to the Academic Registrar, MMU, All Saints Building, Oxford Road, Manchester, M15 6BH.

Seeing your Marked Exam Scripts

Some departments will be willing to show you your marked exam script. But you do not have a legal right to insist on this – exam scripts are excluded from the records that people are entitled to see under the Data Protection Act. However the Data Protection Act does permit you to see a copy of the remarks made by internal examiners on your exam script.

Allegations of Cheating

You may be called to an investigation by the head of department and possibly an Assessment Disciplinary Committee if the University suspects that you may have tried to cheat in assessments. Get advice urgently if you are accused of cheating. The Advice Centre can discuss your situation with you and may be able to represent you at the University investigation hearings.

The consequences of cheating can be very serious, so make sure that you know what is allowed, and what is not. For instance, do not take unauthorised material into the exam hall, and make sure that you know the rules on plagiarism.

Every year a number of students are found to have included in their work passages which they have copied from texts or the Internet without proper referencing (this is known as plagiarism). Make sure that this does not happen to you by paying very careful attention to guidance on referencing, which is available from your tutors and from the Faculty Student Support Officer. Also be aware that the University routinely conducts a simple search to check whether passages of an essay have been copied direct from the Internet.

Appealing against Exam and Assessment Results

All MMU students have a right to appeal if they believe that the Board of Examiners has made an incorrect decision. You must establish clear grounds for appeal – you cannot appeal simply because you disagree with the examiners or think the decision unfair:

Grounds for appeal fall into 2 categories:

20.8(i) Mitigating Circumstances

You must show that your performance was adversely affected by mitigating circumstances.

Examples:

- illness
- personal problems
- crisis at a crucial time

You also need to give a satisfactory explanation for failing to disclose this information before the Board of Examiners' meeting.

(ii) Administrative Error/ Procedural Irregularity / Breach of Regulations - which cast doubt on the validity of the assessment result

Examples:

- invigilator stopped exam too early
- Board of Examiners applied course regulations incorrectly

Time Limits:

Appeals should be submitted within 21 days (inclusive of weekends) of the publication of results. The University may extend this deadline if there is a good reason for delay. Appeal using the form Request for a Review of a Board of Examiners' Decision, available from your department office or the Advice Centre.

For more information on appeals, see the Advice Centre's booklet on Academic Appeals and if possible consult the Advice Centre before submitting your appeal.

Disciplinary Procedures

Your conduct as a student is governed by a variety of regulations and there are different procedures for dealing with alleged misbehaviour, cheating in exams or assessments, poor attendance, library offences, etc. All students should have been given a copy of the University's regulations and procedures at the start of the course.

If you face a disciplinary investigation, you should establish the procedure under which your case is being considered – then seek advice. Remember that the allegations do not assume that you are guilty, merely that there is sufficient cause for concern to merit an investigation.

You will have a chance to state your case, refute the allegations, and if necessary to present evidence of mitigating circumstances. If there is a hearing to consider the allegations, you will be permitted to take along a friend or representative.

It is essential that you get help and advice. The Advice Centre has experience of assisting students with all kinds of disciplinary matters. Contact them as soon as you become aware of the threatened proceedings. They can help you to prepare your case, give you support, and if possible, represent you.

Seeing your University File

The Data Protection Act 1998 gives you the right to see a copy of your University file. To request a copy, complete an Access to Information form, available from your faculty office. There is a £10 fee. The University should send you your file within 40 days.

Complaints Procedure

If you are unable to resolve disputes or grievances informally, you may wish to pursue the matter by using the University's Complaints Procedure. Copies are available from your faculty office or the Advice Centre.

If you have reached the end of the University complaints procedure and are still dissatisfied, you have the right to complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (www.oiahe.org.uk).

Contact the Advice Centre for more information or help:

Manchester 3rd Floor, Students' Union, 99 Oxford Road, Manchester, M1 7EL
Tel: 0161 247 6533,
Fax 0161 247 6314
E-mail: s.u.advice@mmu.ac.uk

The Advice Centre runs advice sessions at Crewe, Alsager
Didsbury, Aytoun, Hollings and Gaskell.

Phone 0161 247 6533 to book an appointment

Advice Centre Opening Times

Opening Times	
Monday	9.30am - 4pm
Tuesday	Closed
Wednesday	9.30am - 4pm
Thursday	9.30am - 4pm
Friday	9.30am - 4pm

We also operate a telephone service between 10-12 noon each weekday or e-mail your enquiry to s.u.advice@mmu.ac.uk

Reminder

If you feel that your academic performance has suffered because of problems you have experienced, it is imperative that you inform the Board of Examiners prior to its meeting of the nature of your difficulties and the way in which they have affected your assessed work. You can do this by completing of Disclosure of Exceptional Factors form. Read the Guiding Principles for Boards of Examiners before you fill in the form. The form and the Guiding Principles can be obtained at the Advice Centre or your department office. If you fail to do this, you prejudice your chances of a successful appeal against your results.

Useful Addresses

Advice Centre:	99 Oxford Road, Manchester, M1 7EL Tel: 0161 247 6533 Fax: 0161 247 6314 e-mail :s.u.advice@mmu.ac.uk Web: www.mmunion.co.uk
Students' Union, Alsager	Alsager Campus, Hassall Road, Alsager, ST7 2HL Tel: 0161 247 5496
Students' Union Crewe	Tel: 0161 247 5136
Student Services, Manchester	All Saints Building, MMU, Oxford Road, Manchester, M15 6BH. Tel 0161 247 3480
Careers	Tel: 0161 247 3483 Web: www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/
Chaplaincy	Tel: 0161 275 2894 Web: www.stpeters.org.uk/index.php
Counselling	Tel: 0161 247 3493
Learning Support Cheshire	Tel: 0161 247 3491 Web: www.mmu.ac.uk/lsu 0161 247 5326
Student Services Alsager	Northfields Building, Alsager; Tel: 0161 247 5326
International Society	327 Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PG Tel: 0161 275 4959 Fax: 0161 275 7696 e-mail : int.soc@manchester.ac.uk Web: www.internationalsociety.org.uk
Steam Jobshop Cheshire Job Shop	Check the Job noticeboard online at www.mmunion.co.uk www.mmunion.co.uk/jobshop 0161 247 5729
Noticeboards:	Crewe Campus; Students' Union, Conference Centre, Booth Hall Alsager campus; Students' Union, Wesley Centre, Brandies.

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