

Guidelines on the provision of information about students and the writing of References

Version Number 1.3

Effective from 1 March 2016

**Author: Head of Information Governance
Legal, Planning & Governance**

1. Introduction

1.1 These guidelines provide information on:

- the information that is available to students and alumni to confirm their study at the University.
- the conformation of details of degrees by third parties
- the writing of references for students, providing guidance for academic members of staff on the type of material that may and should not be included in the contents of these references.

2. Confirmation of study etc. provided to student/alumni

2.1. Current Students can obtain a proof of study letter which can be used as proof that they are a student at the University of Salford and to open a bank account to show how much you have paid/owe in tuition fees, showing graduation dates (before award from an exam board) and to ensure you do not get charged Council Tax.

2.2. Upon payment of a small administration fee, an academic confirmation letter, transcript and replacement certificate are all available to alumni. An academic conformation letter states the following

- Programme of study;
- Dates of study;
- Award and classification (where applicable)
- Date of award

3. Confirmation of details of degree by third parties

3.1. Confirmation of details of a degree is provided, on the University's behalf by the Higher Education Degree Datacheck Service (HEDD). HEDD is the UK Higher Education's official service for candidate verification and university authentication. It is a service run on behalf of UK universities by Graduate Prospects, the trading arm of the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) which is an agency of Universities UK.

3.2. There is a charge for using HEDD but the University does not receive any income from this service.

3.3. HEDD does not provide information. It verifies an individual's qualification based upon the information provided. It will confirm the following information: full name; date of birth; dates of attendance; University; course title; qualification type and degree classification.

4. Provision of Personal references

4.1 Where a student and a member of academic staff have made an agreement that academic member of staff may make a reference which covers both academic information and personal views on that student such as the suitability of that student for the job in question.

4.2 It is understood that this type of reference is likely to be the most common type of reference issued by the University but should the academic leave the University or decide that they do

not wish to issue a reference, the only information provided by the University will be confirmation of information provided via HEDD (see section 3 above).

- 4.3 Requests for such references should be made directly to the academic member of staff except where a School policy may provide for such a reference automatically.
- 4.4 If a request for a personal reference has been refused on grounds that the student considers unreasonable, s/he should contact the Head of School who may wish to consider the circumstances and assess whether alternative arrangements to provide a personal reference can be made.

5. Guidance for the writing of personal references

5.1 This guidance is intended for academic members of staff who are asked to write references for students they have taught or supervised.

5.2 The principal aims of a reference are:

- to confirm facts: i.e. to confirm the accuracy of statements made in an application; and
- to provide opinions: i.e. to give the referee's opinion as to a candidate's suitability for the post/course in question, and his/her potential for the future

5.3 In writing a reference the following points should be noted:

- a) You have a duty of care to the subject and if a reference is provided for a student which is false, the person giving it may be liable for:
 - defamation in the form of malicious falsehood;
 - deceit, if a false statement is knowingly made; or
 - negligence, if the provider of the reference fails to take reasonable care in its preparation.
- b) References are not confidential: individuals are able to request references from the organisations to which they are provided. **Do not write anything you are not prepared for the subject of the reference to see and write your reference on the basis that it will be disclosed.**
- c) Please ensure that you have all the up to date, relevant information requested to hand, the Student Administration Directorate or your own Schools administrative staff will be able to confirm dates of study, results etc.
- d) You should endeavour to provide a fair and balanced reference in all cases and should always avoid coded language, backhanded compliments and sarcastic comments.
- e) Ensure the facts are accurate and complete, and where you give opinions, these should be stated as such, separate from the facts and only stated where they can be supported.
- f) In those circumstances where an opinion is requested, but knowledge is limited, e.g. in the area of honesty; such wording as "I know of nothing which would lead me to doubt X's honesty" should be used.
- g) Do not include sensitive personal information. You may wish to include such information to demonstrate that the individual has overcome significant challenges or you may wish to give an explanation for poor results or a failure of a test. Nevertheless, disclosure of such

information, rightly or wrongly, may lead to the formation of a negative impression of the individual. Examples of information you should avoid include anything relating to the following:

- Political, religious or other similar beliefs;
- Sexual orientation or other sexual matters;
- Physical or mental health; and
- Convictions or sentences served.

5.4 Place a copy of each reference you give on the appropriate student file.

6. Oral references

6.1 Oral references are subject to the same legal rules as for written references.

6.2 If giving a reference by telephone take all reasonable steps to ensure that the person making the request for the reference is who they say they are and that they have legitimate grounds for making the request.

6.3 Limit the information given to facts and follow immediately with a written reference confirming what you have said.

7. Private references

7.1 There may be occasions where students and staff members are acquainted in a private capacity (e.g. members of clubs and or societies) where a student may request and the academic member of staff agrees that he/she will in his/her private capacity, provide a reference for the student.

7.2 Requests for such references should be made directly to the academic at their personal address.

7.3 Private references are not references given by or on behalf of the University and must not, under any circumstance:

- be given using University headed paper; or
- contain any personal data obtained from University records.

7.4 The member of staff must also include a statement that the reference is being provided in a personal capacity and not on behalf of the University,