

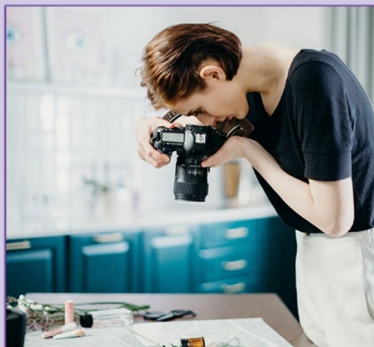
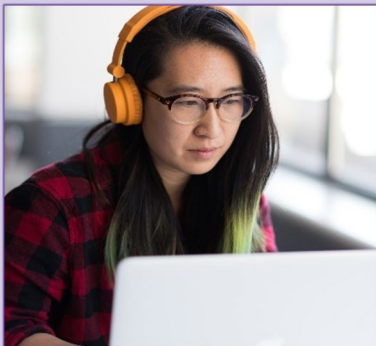
LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY

# COURSE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

May 2022

Centre for Learning and Teaching

[www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk](http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk)



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## Academic Principles

The following research-informed academic principles can be used to inform the design of our courses. Course teams should refer to these principles when considering the design of new courses and reviewing their existing courses.

These principles support the improvement of progression and continuation rates, satisfaction, student achievement and outcomes. Maximising the engagement of students in their course is the key theme to this guidance. Course teams are responsible for adopting the academic principles and applying them to all aspects of their course design and delivery.

This guidance has been updated to reflect the changes we need to consider as we work towards a blended and inclusive approach to our teaching and course design. The resources and references linked with this document are included in the [Course Development Principles reading list](#) on Talis Aspire, which can be printed to show the URLs.

In order to grow our community, support progression, prevent student drop out and isolation and maintain a high-quality learning experience, we need to design in strategies for facilitating student engagement, active, independent and experiential learning, along with critical thinking.

The eight course development principles can help you to think about sustainable, flexible, inclusive ways to build course communities and course identity into all our learning environments. Remember, the student that you need to engage may be in front of you in a classroom, a predictable well-organised space, but they could also be engaging online, working from a kitchen, at a desk, or via a mobile phone.

The principles align with our [University Education Plan](#), the [Learning Pathway](#) and the [Undergraduate Graduate Attributes](#).

[Our Education plan](#) aims to: develop a flexible learning environment which supports all learners to enter highly-skilled employment; to develop teaching and learning alongside research and innovation: to maintain a stimulating academic portfolio which attracts students: and to provide all of this within a supportive and collegiate academic culture, which builds confidence and trust between educators and students.

Our course principles support [the Learning Pathway](#) approach to developing teaching excellence as part of our University Strategy. It has been divided in to 6 major areas shown below in the Learning Pathway framework that together contribute to supporting the aim of delivering an excellent education and experience. Further information and curated resources are available at the [Centre for Learning and Teaching \(CLT\) webpages](#).

Our [three Graduate Attributes](#) (enterprise, digital literacy, global outlook) are integrated into the application of the Course Development Principles. A graduate attribute is an amalgamation of skills, knowledge and attitudes, built up through a student's time at University. These attributes have been chosen in order to enhance a student's employability, graduate outcomes and provide skills for them to thrive in the wider world, as well as to enhance their satisfaction with the learning experience.

Course teams may find that they need to think more about some principles than others. A chronological order which course teams may wish to use as a practical basis for discussion is suggested below.

### The Principles

- 1. Threshold Concepts**
- 2. Course Integrity**
- 3. Course Identity**
- 4. Depth of Learning**
- 5. Inclusive Learning Environment**
- 6. Challenging and Authentic Learning Activities**
- 7. Course Level Assessment Strategy**
- 8. Personalised Student Support**

## Support for Course Teams

CLT will use our knowledge and resources to help you develop and enhance your courses:

Online resources for you to browse or pose a new question can be found as follows:

- On the University's [Teach/Learn website](#)
- [Inclusive Assessment Guidance](#)
- [Inclusive Course Design Tool](#)
- In the University's [Taxonomy of Assessment Domains document](#).
- Details on the [Academic Approval, Periodic Review and Modifications Process](#) are available [online](#) along with [templates](#) to support this.
- Information is provided to help identify which [digital tools](#) are recommended for supporting different situations.
- For wholly distance learning delivery a [design template](#), which can help you think about which tools can be useful to support your aim or pedagogical approach has been created.

### References:

References and further reading for this section can be found in the [Support for Course Teams](#) section of the [Course Development Principles reading list](#) on Talis Aspire.

# 1. Threshold Concepts

## ***What is it?***

**The idea of a key, core, or threshold, concept is that certain ideas are held to be central to the mastery of a subject (Meyer and Land, 2003).**

‘Threshold Concepts’ may be considered “akin to passing through a portal” or “conceptual gateway” that opens up “previously inaccessible way[s] of thinking about something” (Meyer and Land, 2003). Once understood, these change the way in which the student views the discipline. They may be challenging to acquire but can bring together different aspects of the subject that previously did not appear to be related.

## ***Course-level Threshold Concepts***

It can support consistency and course integrity if course teams work together to establish course-level and module-level threshold concepts. Communicating these clearly with students can help them to understand how different modules work together and complement one another. It can also strengthen their sense of identity particularly with the subject discipline and on accredited professional courses (Rodger et al, 2015).

## ***Focusing the Curriculum***

According to Cousin (2006), using threshold concepts can help overcome ‘a stuffed curriculum’, in which there is a tendency for academics to burden themselves ‘with the task of transmitting vast amounts of knowledge bulk and their students of absorbing and reproducing this bulk’. She argues that focus on threshold concepts can enable teachers to make refined decisions about what is fundamental to a grasp of the subject they are teaching.

## **References**

References and further reading for this section can be found in the [Threshold Concepts](#) section of the [Course Development Principles reading list](#) on Talis Aspire.

### Course teams could ask:

- What are the **threshold concepts** our students need to understand and internalise on the course?
- What are the **core qualities, knowledge and skills** the students need to develop to help with understanding and internalising the threshold concepts?
- How do they relate to, and address, the **subject benchmark statements** and/or **professional body requirements**?
- Which threshold concepts are most appropriately **developed at each level**?
- Is your curriculum **overstuffed**? What content might be removed to make threshold concepts clearer and give time and space to teaching related to them?
- How can you encourage the students to **engage** with and **understand** the concepts?
- How can the way you design and teach your course help the students really **achieve the learning outcomes** and **understand the fundamentals**?
- How can you **use your contact hours effectively** to help students grasp threshold concepts? Think about using a combination of large and small group teaching, with both synchronous and asynchronous activities, to best engage your students with these concepts.
- How can you **highlight the connections** between threshold concepts in the different modules, this can strengthen the course identity?

## 2. Course Integrity

### What is it?

**Course Integrity is when a course provides all students with a foundation and a clear, integrated, learning pathway. All modules should link to and support the development of Course Integrity, helping to underpin a cohesive student learning experience.**

### *Core Course Integrity*

Every course needs to provide its students with opportunities to orientate to, prepare for, and integrate into their course. This course foundation needs to be designed to ensure that all students can engage with their specific course's curriculum, learning environment and programme of learning activities. Course teams should be assured that all students, regardless of the additional content they study or options they choose, have the requisite opportunities to engage with, and progress from, a coherent programme of study.

### *Module Learning Outcomes*

Course integrity must be considered as part of good course design and development and should be clearly documented so it is meaningful for staff and students. Module learning outcomes and assessments should be written and integrated into the course design, with clear consideration for other modules. This should help students see the links and connections between their modules across the course, and help teaching staff to have a better understanding of how their module activities, and assessment, fit into the course as a whole.

### *Course Themes*

Themes within the course can be used to make connections between levels (i.e., level 4, 5 and 6 for undergraduates) and provide opportunities to deepen learning with core threshold concepts being revisited throughout the course. Connections that are made at the initial design stage, for example within level 4, or level 7, might include mapping themes of learning and designing synoptic assessments.

### References

References and further reading for this section can be found in the [Course Integrity](#) section of the [Course Development Principles reading list](#) on Talis Aspire.



### Course teams could ask:

- How do your course design and pedagogical approaches encourage development of **learning across each module/level** and as the level of study increases (for undergraduates)?
- Have you devised and planned learning themes which entwine through every module and level, encapsulates the **threshold concepts** of the course, and helps with the application and integration of knowledge?
- If applicable, how have your **professional body requirements** (including Degree Apprenticeships) and **subject benchmarks** informed the development of the course and how has this informed curriculum design?
- What opportunities do course teams have to ensure that the **curriculum delivery** is effective and appropriate for the needs of the student and avoids unnecessary duplication of learning activities and assessments?
- When and how do tutors **develop their understanding** of the parts of the course they are not directly involved in. How do they **share this** with each other? Could you have team teaching and regular team meetings? Could you encourage collaborative course development and hold course design meetings with your Module Leaders/teaching teams? environment?
- What **strategies** do staff use to explain course integration to students? What are the best ways of doing this?
- Has the development and design of the course been **informed** by the taxonomy of assessment domains at each level?
- Does the way you give feedback to students on their assessments give them the opportunity to **make links to content and ideas** addressed in other modules? Is the feedback phrased in a way that is developmental and encourages the student to think and improve?

## 3. Course Identity

### ***What is it?***

**Course identity ensures that a course is owned by an identifiable team who feel a strong sense of responsibility for an identifiable cohort of students.**

### ***Relationship building***

A focus on developing strong relationships between staff and students and between students has been shown to contribute to a sense of belonging (Gijn-Grosvener and Huisman, 2020, Pedler et al., 2021) and this leads to higher achievement and increased progression (Fink et al. 2020). Course identity is further strengthened when students share experiences across levels and cohorts and with those working in relevant professions.

### ***Communication***

To build a clear course identity, teams should send consistent early messages through course promotional literature, open days and induction, and build on these throughout the course. This generates a shared understanding of the distinctive course aims, outcomes and expectations. Online communities can be set up through a range of platforms, including MS Teams, to facilitate ongoing communication.

### ***Creating a Unique Course Space***

Campus-based courses often have a strong sense of belonging and identity helped by the physical environment, shared School and social learning space, course sports teams etc. Online and distance learning courses can build this through carefully designed online spaces, virtual course meetings, regular online announcements, virtual social or course society activity and having a digitally engaged Course Director.

### **References**

References and further reading for this section can be found in the [Course Identity](#) section of the [Course Development Principles reading list](#) on Talis Aspire.

### Course teams could ask:

- Is there a task appropriate to an **overall learning outcome** of the course that could be used in the very first session to help develop course identity and sense of belonging?
- Is the course **planned and coordinated coherently**? Is there a strong, course design and 'feel', with decisions made at course level? How do you demonstrate this in online environments?
- Do you have a well-designed, consistent, set up as a 'home', **with one point of initial contact (a gateway)**, where students can access all their online materials, regardless of which tool or platform is used beyond that point? Is messaging and language consistent?
- How do you **foster student/staff relationships** on the course, both at course and module level? How do you support staff in developing these relationships - providing guidelines around how often and how to communicate and how to set boundaries to protect staff time and wellbeing?
- How do course and level learning outcomes build towards your course identity by linking to **threshold concepts**?
- Do course and module titles support a **distinctive course identity**?
- How do **module staff work together** to understand how their module contributes towards the course identity?
- How do you use **physical and online space** to support your course identity?
- What encouragement and opportunities are there for all your students, across all academic levels, to **develop supportive networks** with others on their course before their induction/at induction/throughout and beyond the course?
- Does the language used in your course materials reflect the audience which it is targeted towards, i.e., prospective and existing students? Does your description of the course, and its modules, **attract students' interest**?
- Could you **engage alumni and industry partners** to strengthen your course identity?
- What opportunities are there to **celebrate student achievement** on the course and facilitate social integration? Students can easily feel less engaged and more distant when working more online, at distance and/or part-time.
- How will you foster course community and a **sense of belonging** if delivery is **not** on campus?

## 4. Depth of Learning

### ***What is it?***

Deep learning is the slow growth of a student's development throughout their course. Individual students may engage more deeply with their learning through three different, but interconnected, dimensions - reflective learning, higher order learning and integrative learning (Wang et al, 2014).

### ***Benefits***

The focus of learning should be on educational gain, as well as educational performance. Laird et al (2014). highlight that deep approaches to learning tend to lead to improved grades, better understanding and retention of information as well as 'greater enjoyment of learning'.

### ***Activities which encourage deep learning***

Capabilities that are associated with deep learning include reflecting upon, synthesising, applying, critically evaluating and analysing. These capabilities should be directly expressed in the learning outcomes and aligned with the module and course activities, and assessment. Our LBU taxonomy of assessment domains, based on Bloom's original taxonomy work, can support you with engaging students in deep learning at different levels.

### ***Authentic learning and assessment to support deep learning***

Deep learning involves students participating in the construction of their own knowledge, and is fostered through challenging and authentic learning processes, and by creating a learning environment which facilitates problem solving, researching, appreciating multiple perspectives, and working collaboratively. Deeper learning is unlikely to be achieved when assessment only requires reproduction of, and/or memorising, content (Masuku et al, 2021, Fensham and Bellochi, 2013).

### **References**

References and further reading for this section can be found in the [Depth of Learning](#) section of the [Course Development Principles reading list](#) on Talis Aspire.

### Course teams could ask:

- Students on all courses (including online and Degree Apprenticeships) need to be **engaged in deep thinking and deep critical learning**. How can you encourage engagement in deeper learning? What approaches do you use on your course to encourage student engagement via active, collaborative and applied learning?
- Are there opportunities for students to **explore ideas and concepts in depth**? Are the students being **challenged**?
- To what extent do the module and course content achieve **balance between breadth and depth of study**? Could we slim down content to facilitate greater depth of learning?
- Do your course and module learning outcomes require students to display **higher order thinking**, i.e., reasoning, application, evaluation and critical thinking skills?
- Can you use asynchronous activities to enable students to **move onto higher level learning** activities during synchronous teaching? Are there **opportunities for embedding research and practitioner-informed teaching**?
- In what way does the student experience involve **progressively deepening learning over the duration of the course**?
- How do your **assessment activities** align with your learning outcomes in requiring higher order thinking? Just focusing on the reproduction of module content does not promote deeper understanding of the subject. Are **assessment criteria** potentially unhelpful by (for example) requiring breadth at the expense of depth, and thus encouraging too much of a superficial approach?
- "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984), and can enhance the **synthesis and application of knowledge**. How is experiential learning threaded through your module design and learning activities throughout the course?

## 5. Inclusive Learning Environment

### ***What is it?***

An inclusive learning environment involves staff behaving in a non-discriminatory manner and being respectful of others and expects students to do the same. 'Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education refers to the ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all.' (Hockings, 2010). 'Accessibility involves designing systems to optimise access. 'Being inclusive is about giving equal access and opportunities to everyone wherever possible.' (Taylor & Mote, 2021).

### ***Inclusivity***

An inclusive curriculum includes a range of cultural, global and social perspectives and/or practices, and allows all students to draw on their prior life experiences, the Inclusive Course Design Tool (LBU, 2020) can support staff in creating an inclusive curriculum. Inclusive assessment is varied, free of cultural and gender-biased assumptions, clearly presented and enables students to draw on and develop relevant experience (LBU, 2022). Inclusivity can be enhanced by flexible approaches to learning, teaching and assessment (Jones-Devitt, 2017). It is important to remember that vulnerable students can feel even more isolated in an online environment and it is important to build in opportunities for engagement, kindness, community building and a social presence into the online learning environments (Hockings, 2010).

### ***Accessibility***

As John and Fox (2003) emphasise, building accessibility into teaching design from the start is much more efficient than trying to adapt resources later. In the face-to-face environment, this might involve thinking about how a classroom is set up and which activities you choose to use. In the online environment, accessibility considerations include thinking about whether videos are captioned, images include alternative text added and websites are accessible for those using screen readers.

### **References**

References and further reading for this section can be found in the [Inclusive Learning Environment](#) section of the [Course Development Principles reading list](#) on Talis Aspire.

## Course teams could ask:

### Admissions and Welcome

- Does your admissions criteria reflect the needs and diversity of potential students, ensuring no section of the student community is automatically deselected by **particular requirements**?
- Do we ensure that all **students feel welcomed** into the course and do we work, as part of induction, to ensure that **all** students are welcoming towards others on their course?

### Inclusivity

- How do course materials and activities represent a range of **cultural, global and social perspectives and/or practices**, and allow all students to draw on their prior life experiences? **“Decolonising”** is about us rethinking, reframing and reconstructing current curricula to make them better and more inclusive.
- Do your reading lists and resources include a diverse range of authors which reflect a range of perspectives about issues discussed as part of the module content? This will help students feel empowered, **belong to the learning community** and have a contribution to make.
- Are students given opportunities to access staff and external experts from a **range of communities and cultures**?
- Do you include pedagogies that contribute to **learner empowerment** such as co-creation, student choice within assessment and the decolonising of the dominant western-focused discourses (Ryan and Tilbury, 2013)?
- There is some evidence (Yan Yang et al, 2015) that **different genders** perceive and experience the physical and online learning environment differently. Think about how you design your courses to appeal to all genders (Fink, 2020).

### Accessibility

- Are you, as a course team, familiar with **“reasonable adjustment”**, especially for field trips, session planning, delivery and assessment? Are all your students able to access a range of opportunities? Can the activities be embedded within the daily standard timetable? Is there alternative provision?
- Have you designed activities and scheduled synchronous sessions **with all students in mind** - considering part-time students, those with caring and other responsibilities, and religious calendars?

### Delivery Modes

- How do you manage interaction, paired activity, **discussion and student participation**, both online and physically, to encourage and optimise engagement and inclusion?

- How do you organise your large and small group activities to **enhance social mixing and learning** and expose students to culturally challenging views, opinions and contexts? Can you develop action learning sets?
- If your course is online only, how do you adapt your **delivery models**? Can you restructure large and small group work over different weeks to optimise contact hours and engagement to make sure those not engaging synchronously are supported?

#### Assessment

- Are there engaging assessments for all learning environments that allow our students to **draw on and develop relevant experience**?
- Are your assessments varied in their methods, free of cultural and gender-biased assumptions, reflecting social and cultural **diversity** where possible and written in a way that avoids jargon and is easily understood by a diverse group of students?

**Have you looked at the LBU Inclusive Course Design Tool?** This Tool will support you and your team to reflect on the design of your course and how to best support all students with opportunities to achieve their very best. It covers many of the questions addressed below and is a holistic way to address multiple areas relating to inclusive course design.

You may also want to refer to our pages on inclusive practice.



## 6. Challenging and Authentic Activities

### ***What does this mean?***

This means providing learning and assessment opportunities which require students to actively apply skills and knowledge appropriate to their area of study, considering their diverse experiences, prior learning and intentions post-graduation.

### ***What makes a task authentic?***

We aim to develop students who can perform meaningful tasks in a changing and challenging world. For a task to be authentic, students should be able to recognise that the activities have relevance to their future and to their employment post-graduation.

Herrington and Herrington (2007) described the need for authentic learning environments which:

- Provide an authentic context that reflects the way knowledge will be used in real life.
- Include authentic activities.
- Provide access to authentic Principle 6 overleaf modelling of processes.
- Include multiple roles and perspectives.
- Provide for collaborative construction of knowledge.
- Provide opportunities for student reflection on their learning.
- Provide opportunities for students to articulate and justify their work.
- Provides coaching and scaffolding.

Including a range of different authentic activities across a course, and offering choice where possible, will contribute towards a more inclusive learning environment.

### ***What makes a task challenging?***

Challenging activities will stretch students' capabilities by providing "the opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives" (Woo et al, 2007).

Courses that include challenging and authentic activities develop in students the skills to perform similar tasks in the workplace and authenticate the application of theoretical knowledge to the learner's real world resulting in deeper learning. Very often authentic tasks are complex and are investigated by students over a sustained period e.g., undertaking a dissertation based on real practice or complex group activity involving multiple roles.

## References

References and further reading for this section can be found in the [Challenging and Authentic Activities](#) section of the [Course Development Principles reading list](#) on Talis Aspire.

### Course teams could ask:

- How might the design we choose, or the pedagogical approaches we adopt, enhance **integration of knowledge and thinking** for student learning? For example, flipped approaches (Jenkins et al, 2017) can vary the levels of teacher presence to enhance student autonomy and problem based (Yew & Goh, 2016) design can enhance critical thinking, holistic thinking and inquiry.
- What **learning activities** are appropriate to your course? How do you make them gradually more complex whilst letting the student work at their own pace and be appropriately challenged and stimulated?
- Do some assessments involve **collaboration and interaction** with other students? If so, how do you formally organise this to ensure all students feel included and have the best opportunity to succeed?
- Could you ask students to lead some activities during the course, **empowering them to share their own experience** and areas of interest?
- How can you best encourage student **motivation and engagement** by provoking conversation to allow students to learn from each other?
- Is **challenge to existing perspectives** and the application of **new understanding** part of assessment? How are you supporting and assessing this learning?
- How do you encourage students **draw on their own experiences** on the course and in their extracurricular life to strengthen their professional and personal development? And how do you scaffold and promote this learning on your course?
- How can we make sure all students are challenged appropriately and we **differentiate our learning** to engage students who may be struggling? How can we scaffold our support for the difference ability levels of students whilst still maintaining a consistent approach to student instructions and criteria?
- Do you ask local stakeholders and employers to work with you to design and devise **authentic learning** activities and assessment briefs? How are you contextualising the assessments to bring them to life?

## 7. Course Level Assessment Strategy

### ***What does this mean?***

This means considering how all assessments across your course relate to one another and to the course, level, and module learning outcomes.

### ***Assessment for Learning***

Assessment is a major driver of student learning. An assessment strategy which is effective, and clearly aligned to the course outcomes, is a key factor in successful course design. This helps to underpin a coherent student learning experience. The opportunity for students to build on, and receive, feedback in different forms should be included as part of the course assessment strategy. When designing assessments, we should regard them as being a tool we can use to support our students' learning, i.e., assessment *for* learning as well as *of* learning (Brown, 2005).

### ***Course-level Assessment Strategy***

It has been common in some parts of higher education to design and discuss assessment primarily at module level, often after the other elements of a course/module have been decided. This can lead to piecemeal assessment and the overuse of assessment methods. Course teams should strike a balance between using a variety of assessment methods for formative and summative assessments, and enabling students to progressively develop expertise, and skills, related to those methods and linked to course and module-level learning outcomes.

### ***Diverse, Authentic Assessment***

Different assessment practices have significant impact on students' approaches to learning. In his principles of assessment design, Rust (2002) demonstrates through a review of the research, that using authentic, real world assessment tasks, inclusive assessment, coherently planned, varied assessment approaches, opportunities for formative assessment and tight mapping to the module learning outcomes are key. A diverse range in the methods of assessment and the integration of self-assessment and peer-assessment approaches is fundamental to student learning (Advance HE).

### **References**

References and further reading for this section can be found in the [Course Level Assessment Strategy](#) section of the [Course Development Principles reading list](#) on Talis Inspire.

### Course teams could ask:

- What will a student's assessment experience or **assessment journey** through all modules and levels of this course be?
- Is **assessment varied across a level of study and designed to support progression** towards learning outcomes?
- Where assessment is online, have you chosen **the right digital tool** to support the assessment outcome? Are the right digital tools and technological support available for the students to feel confident with the assessment method?

### When your assessment is robust, varied, supported by use of technology and possible in both face-to-face and online environments, also consider:

- Are **formative assessments** planned into and throughout the assessment strategy to support student learning?
- Has the appropriate preparation for assessment been designed so that students feel supported and their learning is **scaffolded** when they meet a new assessment type, whether it be online or campus based?
- Are formative (assessment for learning) and summative (assessment of learning) assessment **deadlines sensibly spaced** across the course? Do you have a course assessment calendar?
- Does our approach to assessment support our students' **learning and development of skills outlined in module and course learning objectives**?
- If students are undertaking **group work as part of an assessment**, are they shown the correct tools to support this activity and given sufficient guidance?
- How are opportunities built-in for students to **use what they have learned** in one assessment, in subsequent assessments?

## 8. Personalised Student Support

### ***What is personalised student support?***

This means ensuring students feel they are recognised and supported as individuals on their courses.

### ***Student-staff contact***

Opportunities for student-staff contact is a key factor in student motivation and involvement. Knowing members of staff well can enhance a student's experience on their course and enable them to get the most out of university life (Richardson et al, 2007). All our students need to know who they can turn to for help. This might be individual academic advice, personal matters (such as relationships or challenging personal circumstances) or technical issues, which affect their academic performance. Our Academic Advisors are key contacts who can help support personalised learning by discussing, in depth, with students their academic challenges and the ways in which they learn best. Positive, personalised, support involves listening to and engaging with a students' concerns or pointing them towards the right people or services with the means to better support them.

### ***Multiple Communication Channels***

Highlighting and offering multiple communication channels (Dixson, 2010) is a more inclusive approach, enabling students to get in touch when convenient for them and giving them options about who to contact about any issues. Setting clear expectations around communication is especially important in the online teaching environment.

### ***Support from start to finish***

Fostering relationships between students and staff and between students and their peers is particularly important in the early stages of a course. The move to becoming a university student can be emotionally challenging due to complex lives, for example, if juggling studies with a job and family caring commitments (Tobbell et al, 2008). A student may feel anxious about starting university learning and unsure of the academic expectations of Higher Education. The independent learning required from university study can feel isolating and some students may not know how to take ownership of their learning and lack confidence in their academic work (Richardson, 2007; Al Zumor et al, 2013) and this may cause them to disengage from extra-curricular activities designed to support them.

### **References**

References and further reading for this section can be found in the [Personalised Student Support](#) section of the [Course Development Principles reading list](#) on Talis Aspire.

## Course teams could ask:

### Staff/Student contact

- How are academic advisors **engaging with the students**? Do you have a proactive course contact strategy? Are the first years receiving meaningful contact swiftly on arrival so they have an individual link to academic staff? How effectively are staff referring the student on for specialist help? Are they using the online student support framework?
- How do you **build your social presence** in a course to convey a sense of your own engagement and personality? Could you use personalised student and staff profiles, start each session with a regular personalised check-in and disclose personal information snippets appropriately to build staff/student trust? Could you follow-up with individual students after the session and design online and/or physical informal drop-ins?
- Can you use **student mentors or cross-level support** to build personal support between students as well as between tutors and students?

### Support from start to finish

- How can we design and structure the course to **foster a real sense of belonging** for the students? How can we build relationships and a learning community with students, both online and on-campus?
- Do all new students **know who to contact** if part of their experience isn't working? Are they signposted to their Course Director as well as Academic Advisors for responses? Can you replace nameless institutional contact with a personal approach? The Academic Advisor guidance has ideas for how you can best link up with your students remotely.
- How might you **reinforce student support** in subsequent weeks?
- Do we use **diagnostic assessment** at appropriate points in the course? How do you identify and support struggling students, regardless of study mode?
- Do you use MyProgress to access **student results, progress and profiles**?

### Multiple communication channels

- Do you provide **multiple communication channels** (e.g., MS Teams, email, published office hours) so that students can get in touch when it is convenient for them? Do you ensure that students know what they can expect from you in terms of response time and channels so they do not have unrealistic expectations from academic and support staff?
- How do we deliver our activities in a personalised, **individual**, way? How do we know that each of our students is receiving the type and level of support they need?
- How can we help students who are working online or at a distance feel that they **being treated as an individual** and are not just one of a crowd

