

Revised April 2007

REPUBLIC OF RWANDA



**HIGHER EDUCATION COUNCIL
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**NATIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE
POLICY**

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NATIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE POLICY

1. Policy Context and Aims

The National Student Support and Guidance Policy consists of a series of related statements of student entitlement designed to inform all institutions' support policies and underpin their strategic goals for access, progression, retention, employability and the enhancement of the student experience. Specifically, the objectives and goals are to contribute to the following:

- To ensure that students are supported in their transition to higher education and are enabled to acquire the necessary study skills.
- To ensure a systematic, coherent, structured and consistent approach to the "First Year Experience" to maximise retention and progression.
- To provide a coherent range of guidance and learning support mechanisms capable of meeting the needs of the student body.
- To provide specific support in the learning of languages and computer skills.
- To facilitate students' awareness of and control over the graduate skills they acquire during the degree and to help them document and demonstrate these.

"Student support and guidance", in the context of this policy, refers to activities designed to assist students with making decisions and developing their skills to maximise their learning opportunities, academic, career and personal development.

Included in these processes are information, advice, guidance, counselling, negotiation, advocacy/representation, mentoring/coaching, referral, access and bridging activities, learner support and personal development planning.

The general aims of the Policy are to:

- provide information and impartial guidance for all current students about
 - The academic programmes
 - All aspects of student life
 - Academic options
- Provide a comprehensive induction programme for all new students
- Provide specialist information, advice, guidance, learning support and counselling services for current students
- Provide systematic academic and personal support for all students at programme level
- Enable students to document their achievement in a form accessible to employers
- Provide appropriate forms of support and guidance for students at the point of departure from the Institution.

2. Elements

- Student Induction Policy
- Academic Support Policy
- Careers Education Information and Guidance Policy
- Personal Development Planning (separate document)
- Equality and Diversity Policy (separate document)
- Complaints and Grievance Procedure for Students (separate document)
- Harassment Policy for Staff and Students (separate document)

3. Statement of Standards

Student support and guidance provision at the institution will be:

- Learner-centred
- Consistent in quality across all of its specialist and generic aspects
- Accurate and timely
- Impartial
- Accessible and appropriate
- Recorded and monitored
- Available in forms and at times convenient for the enquirer
- Confidential except where necessary and agreed

It shall be each institution's aim to provide and develop appropriate support mechanisms for students. 'Appropriate' means that some entitlement to support, such as an induction programme, should be there for all students in all circumstances, but other elements of the provision will be targeted at individuals or groups of students with specific needs - for instance, students with physical disabilities.

Any student who believes that he or she has not been provided with access to appropriate or sufficient support under this policy has the right to use the institution's informal and formal complaints and grievance mechanisms to address their concerns.

3 Student Induction Policy

All students should be provided with an appropriate induction/orientation into their programme of study. This means supporting them to develop the skills necessary to study effectively in HE as well as introducing subject knowledge.

The induction programme for all new students should:

- Be affordable, accessible and relevant to every new student, irrespective of year of study, month of entry, mode of study, student individual needs and nature of programme

- For full-time, undergraduate programmes, offer a free initial week of activities, provided centrally and at programme level as an immersion into the life of the institution
- Include a formal welcome to the institution
- Be tailored to each student's individual programme
- Include the distribution of general and programme-specific information and resources
- Provide a general introduction to the institution, its personal support facilities, the Students' Association and life in the surrounding area
- Provide an introduction to learning support facilities and study methods
- Allow for the social interaction of students and promote student involvement in academic and non-academic activities provided by the institution and the Students' Association
- Involve an introduction to the student's individual Academic Adviser for their first year of study
- Involve current students and others in mentoring/coaching roles where possible and appropriate
- Ensure that all students are made aware of their rights and responsibilities in relation to health and safety, discipline, student representation, complaints and grievances, appeals, information technology and any other relevant regulations and/or codes

Following induction, the institution should

- Provide follow up at appropriate points after entry, particularly throughout the first Semester, in the lead-up to assessments and at other points in the first year of study
- Provide support arrangements at other transitional points in a student's career, such as prior to work placements and prior to withdrawal/completion.

Much of this support will be provided by 'Academic Advisers' discussed in the next section.

4 Academic Support Policy

All students, irrespective of programme, level and mode of study, should have access to appropriate and accessible academic support throughout their student experience.

The aim of the institution's academic support policy must be to ensure that all students experience progressive development, support and recognition of subject knowledge, and develop the cognitive and generic skills necessary to maximise their learning opportunities, academic, career and personal development and the likelihood of progressing to employment or further study on graduation

Academic support may include some or all of the activities listed below. It is anticipated that academic staff will be responsible for activities identified by italics.

Staff undertaking these activities will be designated 'Academic Advisers'. All other activities may be shared responsibilities between academic staff and other designated individuals/services.

- Information about academic support provision
- Programme-specific orientation
- Development of learning strategies, study and ICT skills
- Learning support with transferable/ generic skills development
- Disability support
- Peer support/mentoring/coaching
- Curriculum-specific advice and guidance
- Formative feedback on academic progress
- Summative feedback on academic progress
- Personal Development Planning
- Careers education, information and guidance (Student Services)
- Advice on academic programme requirements/options/change of programme/module choices
- Advice on special circumstances and academic appeals (Student Services/Registry)
- Early identification of and intervention with "at risk" students
- Exit advice/counselling
- Reporting, monitoring and evaluation

All students are entitled to a named personal Academic Adviser throughout their studies (though the identity of this individual may change over time). Students will be given the opportunity to change Adviser without question once, if this is practical. All students should be advised of the types of academic support available to them, at the point of joining the institution, and how they may access that support

All students in their first year of study will have the opportunity and be expected to meet with their personal Academic Adviser within the first two weeks of their programme (either induction week or the first week of teaching). In all years, all students will be offered an opportunity to discuss their progress with their Academic Adviser during the early weeks of each semester

All students will be informed also of examination procedures, the consequences of absenteeism from classes and the disciplinary codes associated with such issues as plagiarism, misconduct and dishonesty

Academic Advisers will make themselves available for student contact at times and in ways agreed in advance and publicised to students. Academic Advisers are expected to make a minimum of four hours per week available for student contact during teaching weeks and appropriate arrangements in case students need academic support

outside these times. Students should be able to contact Academic Advisers during all revision periods including the lead-up to re-sit/re-submission dates

Programme Boards will ensure that all students who fail one or more course are given an appointment to meet with an Academic Adviser as soon as practicable after the notification of results

All staff undertaking academic support functions are expected to undertake appropriate training and updating

5 Personal Development Planning

The PDP process requires that students are provided with a list of the employability skills and required to accumulate a portfolio of evidence demonstrating that they have gained them. They should be introduced to the process at the very beginning of the degree and supported in completing their portfolio by an Academic Adviser system. There should be key points during the degree at which students are required to reflect on and evidence their achievements in the portfolio and plan their further personal development. They should be provided with a set of guides and a template to support them in reflecting on skills development and undertaking PDP. The process not only enables the student to reflect on what skills they have developed, raise their self-awareness and take some control of their development; it also allows them to articulate what they have achieved in a way that employers will understand.

To meet national need, PDP and employability skills should be formally assessed in the final year of the degree, and a pass should be a requirement for graduation, though this should not carry explicit credit or contribute towards the class of the degree or the award of distinction.

6 Student obligations

All students are expected to:

- Fulfil the academic expectations on them from their programme; this includes attending classes, tutorials, seminars and labs as appropriate
- Discuss their academic progress with their Academic Adviser at least twice a year, at the beginning of each Semester
- Use the support offered by Academic Advisers as and when they identify particular issues to do with their academic progress
- Make effective use of their Personal Development Portfolio and the accompanying guidance
- Respond promptly to communications and advice from their Academic Adviser

7. Careers Education, Information and Guidance Policy

Students are entitled to:

- Accessible, impartial careers education, information and guidance
- Information about the skills and knowledge that can be acquired during their study, to progress their career development
- Opportunities to develop transferable/key skills through careers education, information and guidance while undertaking their programme of studies - in particular, training in entrepreneurialism, work placement and community attachment.