THE TEACHING AND LEARNING CONTRACT: OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTATIONS

1 Introduction
Studying at university is different in many ways from studying at school. Firstly, work is expected to be of a higher standard: as the general academic calibre of the individual at university is higher, the standards expected are higher.

Secondly, on entering university, students are expected to take greater responsibility for managing their affairs. It is essential to be able to allocate time, plan workloads and to adopt study habits that will allow the targets set by the university to be met. A high standard of motivation and personal discipline is a pre-requisite. These targets involve more than just success in the examination process. This School expects not only wide reading, but deep, critical, and analytical reading. Time and energy will initially have to be devoted to developing good study habits. However, thought given to study methods during the early stages of university life will form an invaluable basis for effective working practices not only during the latter stages of university but also beyond, throughout a working career.

Thirdly, students should be aware that feedback takes different forms and is a continual process. Some feedback is written on essay comment sheets and will endeavour to be constructive. This is a very individual and a fairly formal form of feedback. Some feedback might be individual but less formal, of the kind that might take place in a tutorial discussion about an essay or dissertation. However, other forms of feedback might be provided to a whole seminar or lecture group, outlining general issues or points concerning the learning and assessment process. Students should be prepared to respond to these different forms of feedback and to recognise that feedback is of an ongoing nature. Students may also discuss their essay feedback from their modules with their personal tutor.

2 Aims
Brunel University’s mission is “to produce high quality graduates and research of use to the community”. We aim to provide high quality teaching to produce graduates with sound theoretical knowledge, transferable skills and high employability. Some of our undergraduate courses also offer students work placement opportunities; we believe these further enhance employability.

The aims of the School are to provide students with:
• programmes that prepare them for both employment and further study via the development of methodological, cognitive and transferable skills;
• effective structures for the provision of appropriate support and advice to students;
• opportunities for undergraduate students to include a work placement component in their degree.
3 Objectives
We seek to achieve these aims, drawing on staff expertise for the development and delivery of the curricula, through providing:

- training in the foundations of the discipline and key skills appropriate for study and employment;
- opportunities for students to develop and extend their analytical, evaluative and critical capabilities;
- constructive feedback and opportunities for students to reflect and improve upon their learning using a robust assessment pattern.

Upon successful completion of their course, students will have developed their:

- understanding of a range of empirical and theoretical approaches employed in the discipline appropriate to the level of study;
- transferable skills;
- capacity to reflect on their learning and intellectual development;
- abilities to evaluate evidence and sources;
- capacity to express concepts and arguments.

In addition, successful undergraduate students will have demonstrated:

- knowledge and understanding of the importance of comparative inquiry;
- understanding of the importance of communication and information technology for the retrieval and presentation of information.

4 Guidelines on Teaching and Learning
These guidelines have evolved from discussions between staff and students, and may be revised in the light of future developments, normally following agreement at the Staff/Student Liaison Committee. To get the best out of your learning experience at Brunel, please observe the following guidelines on 'Student Responsibilities'. If you believe that a lecturer is not observing some part of the 'Staff Responsibilities' please bring it to the attention of the member of staff concerned, or to the attention of the Senior Tutor who has overall responsibility for undergraduate teaching.

A general principle of University life should be understood by all students. A University is a place of learning, but it is not a school. The academic staff are responsible for helping you to learn, but they cannot be successful without your active participation. You are responsible for attending lectures and seminars, and for making sure that you hand in essays on time. The University provides facilities - staff, library resources and the like - which you must learn to exploit effectively during your time here in order to ensure that you obtain the maximum benefit from your studies.
Student Responsibilities

- Registering for appropriate modules consistent with the relevant scheme of studies.

- Attendance at lectures and seminars should be strictly observed. Lateness is a discourtesy to the whole group and the group itself should make it clear that lateness or other disturbing behaviour, for example allowing mobile phones to ring, is not acceptable.

- Students are expected to prepare properly for seminars and lectures even if they are not the individuals expected to make the presentation on that occasion. The interval between seminars gives students sufficient time to prepare their contributions properly. Students who act as ‘free riders’, attending seminars but not doing any preparatory work or making any thought-out contributions to the discussion should be reminded of their obligations by the seminar leader and by student members of the group.

- When making a presentation students should approach the task professionally. Copying or paraphrasing material from books and articles and then reading it out is not acceptable, nor is the reading out of essays written for assessment purposes. Students should try to 'project', by making use of the available visual aids, and should consider using hand-outs where appropriate and feasible.

- Students should not be passive and entirely dependent on the presence of a lecturer. As part of the proactive line which students are encouraged to take, they should be prepared to bring any dissatisfaction or constructive suggestions to the attention of the seminar leader.

- Students of politics and government should take responsibility for following current affairs and understanding the political contexts relating to their courses.

- Students should be open-minded in seminars and tutorials, in the sense that they should be prepared, for educational purposes, to argue for and present positions in which they themselves do not actually believe. (This also applies to lecturers). Likewise, they should accord respect and attention to the arguments presented by fellow students (who may also be playing Devil's Advocate) and not get embroiled in personal arguments.

- Students should be prepared to undertake an independent programme of reading relating to their courses, and should not rely on the lectures to 'cover' the syllabus entirely. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that he/she has mastered the syllabus adequately, even if the lecture series does not give detailed attention to each topic listed in the module outline.

- Students should always carry a diary to enable them to make, and keep appointments and tutorials.

- Organising and scheduling work so that submission deadlines are adhered to. Acceptance of any penalties for non-compliance. Revised submission deadlines must be requested before the submission deadlines. The request form is available from the MJ Centre. Revised submission deadlines may only be granted in EXCEPTIONAL circumstances when these are supported by documentary evidence. Mitigating Circumstances claim forms are available from the MJ Centre.

- Written, and if possible, prior notification of unavoidable inability to attend workshops, seminars and tutorials (e.g. on health grounds).
• Written and, if possible, prior notification of unavoidable inability to submit coursework or attend tests and/or examinations. Students should complete a mitigating circumstances form and forward it to the MJ Centre within seven days of the relevant assessment.

• Strict compliance with University regulations relating to academic offences, such as plagiarism, and acceptance of the penalties for non-compliance.

• Strict compliance with University examination regulations.

• Observation of relevant School notice boards at least once a week and e-mail and u-Link daily for important information including coursework deadlines, test dates, administrative arrangements, possible changes in teaching arrangements and so on.
Staff Responsibilities

- Lecturers should make it clear to students that their sessions will start and finish ON TIME, and should ensure that this commitment is fulfilled. If a lecturer regularly overruns and prevents students from reaching the next session on time, students should politely point out to the lecturer that they have to get to another session each week at that time.

- Lecturers should structure lectures and seminars so as to make it clear to students at the beginning of each session what the precise purpose and shape of that session should be. They should also explain the purpose and shape of the module at the beginning of each term.

- Lecturers should not simply read out long continuous passages of text and should strive to make their lectures interesting.

- Lecturers should normally allow a short review period at the end of each lecture or seminar in order to identify any unresolved problems, to answer any questions arising out of the lecture and to help the students consolidate their learning. Lecturers should also make it known that they are available to answer questions about the course at other times, and should inform students of their office hours.

- Lecturers should be willing to experiment with different forms of seminar, but should always make it clear in advance what the expected role of the students is to be.

- As professional teachers, lecturers should seek and welcome constructive feedback on the effectiveness of the teaching and learning sessions for which they are responsible.

- Lecturers should normally plan and timetable seminar topics well in advance – ideally for a whole term – so that individual students have plenty of notice of their roles in each session (e.g. speaker, chairperson, timekeeper, etc).

- Lecturers should encourage participation and be constructively, rather than dismissively, critical.

- Lecturers should provide a written module outline, so that students can see how the various sessions fit together.

- Lecturers will normally return essays within two weeks of their being handed the essays by the school office (i.e., students should expect the essay back within three weeks of the deadline). For modules with large numbers of students or in other subject areas such as Sociology and/or Economics the handing-back deadline can extend to four weeks.
5 Teaching methods
Teaching in the School of Social Sciences is provided by means of lectures, seminars, workshops and practical work. Not all the methods listed will be used for every discipline. The methods vary in group size and in the level of expected participation.

5.1 Lectures
In lectures, generally members of staff talk and students listen and take notes; students can ask questions for clarification, but detailed discussion is the preserve of the seminars. Lectures give broad coverage, in a relatively formal setting, of a topic which can be explored more fully in the less formal setting of the seminar.

The general functions of lectures are:
- to introduce or explore a topic
- to impart information
- to provide a framework for independent study

It is not necessary to commit every utterance of the lecturer to paper, but to identify and note key points. The key points are usually highlighted by the lecturer’s use of the overhead projector or the whiteboard or by the way in which things are said (for example, a phrase like “The main elements in this process are...” heralds the arrival of some important information).

To gain the maximum benefit from a lecture requires the co-ordination of a number of mental processes. The secret is to actively listen to what is said. Active listening involves more concentration than that required in everyday conversation. Active listening entails:
- preparation before the lecture (for example, how this lecture might relate to the previous lecture or earlier material);
- anticipation of questions that the lecture might address;
- formulation of lines of argument as the lecture proceeds.

Active listening should be supported by note-taking, even if a handout is provided at the lecture or notes are available on u-Link. Lecture notes should:
- reflect the structure of the lecture;
- be organised around topics, sub-headings and number points;
- be condensed and precise.

It is usually very helpful to re-draft lecture notes after the lecture. Lecture notes serve as a framework for further study and should link up with wider reading and essay writing.

Any unclear areas should be addressed as soon as possible, by consulting textbooks, discussing with fellow students and formulating clear questions for seminars.

Note: Students may be asked to leave lectures for unsolicited talking or for causing a disturbance with mobile phones.
5.2 Seminars
Seminars provide students with an opportunity to discuss the material which they have been reading and which they have been hearing in lectures in a more detailed and analytical way. Most seminars will have a pre-determined set of issues, usually with attached reading. You will gain most from the seminar if you have done some of the reading relevant to the issue.

Many students say that a ‘good’ seminar can be an exhilarating experience. If a particular seminar always seems to go badly, students tend to blame the seminar leader – sometimes with good reason. However, the seminar leader alone cannot make the seminar come alive. A seminar is a co-operative enterprise, and each member of the group has a joint responsibility for its success. If you don’t participate, why should the next student? If you interrupt or refuse to listen to another speaker’s views, others are likely to behave in the same way.

In each group you may find students from other departments and a fair number of people you don’t know. The best way to make the seminar group coherent and lively is to try to get to know the other members, by working jointly on presentations or meeting socially together afterwards.

5.3 Workshops
Workshops are generally on a larger basis than a seminar and include practical exercises and group work.

Workshops are provided by different disciplines but are generally used for modules in finance or quantitative subjects, and take the form of working through answers to a previously distributed assignment sheet of exercise questions. These are often, but not exclusively, numerical.

To benefit from workshops it is essential that you prepare by completing the assignment sheet as fully and carefully as possible beforehand. It is an excellent idea to work in groups with other students in preparing for workshop assignments so that you can explain to each other how to answer a question which is an excellent way of increasing your own understanding. The workshop leader will then go through the questions step by step to demonstrate the answer. You are expected to ask if you do not understand a step in the argument (put your hand up!). If you still cannot understand after the workshop leader has explained, and you sense that you are holding up the group’s progress, note your difficulty carefully and see the leader individually during his or her office hour, or by appointment.

If you have difficulties prior to the workshop in completing the assignment sheet, note carefully at what stage you are having difficulties, and be sure to sort it out in the workshop as far as possible.

Don’t be afraid that you’ll look stupid by asking a question, particularly in large groups. It is far more likely that you will not be alone with a difficulty, and fellow students will probably be glad that you have raised it. You will learn by active participation, not by passive listening, in a workshop.

Finally, if you have not prepared for some reason, attend the workshop anyway. You will not get nearly as much from it, but it is better than nothing. Other students will be justifiably annoyed, however, if you make a habit of going to workshops unprepared. Ultimately, success depends on good preparation.
5.4 Practical work
For certain disciplines within the School practical work is fundamental. The theories and ideas of an empirical science must remain in contact and be constantly confronted with the results of observation - made either by means of specially arranged and controlled situations, or in more `natural' settings. All relevant students will be provided with a structured introduction to the various techniques of their main discipline over Levels 1 and 2. Regular attendance at practical modules is a requirement and an attendance register is kept. In addition, the techniques of data analysis, which are taught during Levels 1 and 2 have an important bearing upon both field work and work placements.

6 Attendance at classes
Although attendance is not monitored it is required. Please advise your module tutors of significant attendance difficulties. If you are absent, inform your lecturer or seminar leader and give them information of your attendance problems.