

# First and Second Year Semester one reflection Tutors notes Graham Gough

The first year tutorials in the two weeks following the publication of the exam results will be devoted to discussions with your students about their first semester performance. We would like this to be done with each student on a one-to-one basis during the normal tutorial slot. You should make arrangements for this with the students; some may wish to allocate 15 minutes slots to each student, others may ask them to arrive all at once and wait their turns. We have no wish to impose a uniform system and will be interested to hear how different arrangements succeeded (or not). We will also have a similar exercise with second year students, but these meetings will be *in addition to* the normal tutorial meeting.

Please notify the appropriate year or Joint Honours tutor (IW or CJH for first year, TLF for second year, CM and CSwBM) if any student fails to participate in the exercise.

The students have been issued with a set of questions (see below) which they should address during their discussions with you. First year tutors will also be provided, via email, with their students' records for exams, labs and tutorial performance. We hope to provide second year tutors with similar information.

It is very important that we use the opportunity of this meeting to try to encourage those students who have not performed as well in the first semester as they should, help them to identify ways in which their performance can be improved, and try to prevent them giving up in despair. Many students are not aware of, or don't understand, the examination rules which govern progression. A copy of the rules can be found in the appropriate UG Handbook located at [http://intranet.cs.man.ac.uk/Study\\_subweb/Ugrad/](http://intranet.cs.man.ac.uk/Study_subweb/Ugrad/)

The University progression rules, in summary state that

- The minimum compensatable mark is 30%
- To progress from year  $N$  to  $N + 1$  a student must achieve
  - an overall average of at least 40%
  - reach 40% in individual units totalling at least 80 credits; and
  - reach the compensatable fail mark (30%) in all remaining units.

In addition to these rules we insist that, in the first year, COMP10081 and COMP10092 are passed in both exam and lab components for those students taking these units.

The main purpose of this exercise is to make students stop and think about how they are approaching their studies, and take more responsibility for them. It is not just an exercise for those students who are struggling, but also an opportunity for the better students to reflect on their studies and devise strategies for getting more out of them. First year tutors should also use this as an opportunity to return and discuss their students' reflective notes.

*It is important not just to identify problem areas, but to try to agree actions that the student might take to improve the situation. Please record a summary of the discussion, particularly any agreed actions; first year tutors should use the Tutorial record form for this purpose.*

Most of the questions should be self-explanatory but, at the risk of telling you things you already know, here are a few thoughts on each of the questions.

1. *What were the successes of the first semester? How can I build on those for the future?*

*It's worth thinking here about both academic and non-academic successes, and whether you have the balance right between these.*

Most students will have had *some* successes in the first semester, I think it's important that they identify them and look to build on them. The comment about balance is obviously primarily aimed at those students whose social lives have taken over, but I believe we have some students who have the balance wrong the other way, and are not getting as much out of University life as they might be.

2. *Were there any problem areas, and what can I do to remedy these problems?  
Are there any problem areas that are likely to hold back my performance in the future? Do I need help in tackling any problems?  
Was my attendance satisfactory?  
If there were any problems outside your control that affected your performance then you should also use this opportunity to discuss these in confidence with your tutor.*

If this question brings to light serious problems for which external help may be required, please encourage the student to talk to the year tutor in the first instance, or to use the appropriate University level service, such as Student Counselling or the Central Academic Advisory Service.

3. *How have my study skills developed in the first semester? How can they be improved?  
Issues to consider include: Have I prepared adequately for labs, tutorials and examples classes? Have I used my study time profitably?*

This is an obvious area where any commitment given by the student should be recorded.

4. *Did my exam performance reflect my ability? Was it as good as that in the labs? If there is a difference, why might that be? Am I relying too much on help from others?*

There is a real problem with some students who rely far too heavily on help from others to get them through the labs. You will have the data to judge whether there is a significant difference, please don't let the students fool you or themselves on this one.