

STUDENT SUPPORT FRAMEWORK

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1. Purpose

The Student Support Framework is designed to ensure that appropriate support mechanisms are available for all students at Monaro Higher Education (MHE). This Framework outlines the nature and extent of support services provided by MHE, the external services to which students can be referred and how students are made aware of and access services to assist them to achieve personal wellbeing and academic success.

2. Principles

MHE is committed to supporting a positive culture and providing, as far as practicable all students with the best possible learning experience and removing barriers to effective, rewarding learning. The following principles underpin this commitment.

1. Students learn best when their wellbeing is optimised and they feel safe.
2. Supportive relationships and reasonable standards of support enable students to manage their wellbeing.
3. Support services are delivered in a timely manner.
4. MHE policies and procedures support decision making that optimises student wellbeing.
5. Personal information is treated confidentially.

3. Context

Higher Education in Australia is characterised by high levels of regulatory oversight and a focus on ensuring that higher education institutions meet the current and emerging needs of students and industry. Consequently, MHE has established the Student Support Framework in the context of an integral and sustained commitment to quality, especially related to achieving excellence in the student experience and student outcomes.

MHE recognises that students have individual physical, emotional, psychological or academic needs and that students have challenges and needs specific to their life context and background. Therefore, all MHE staff have a responsibility to assist and support students or refer students to appropriate external support services when needed.

4. Scope

This policy applies to all students of MHE.

5. Definitions

Critical Incident: an extremely disturbing event (which may or may not be life-threatening), or the threat of such an event, which results in high levels of stress, fear, depression or injury, for example, displays of severe aggression, death or critical illness of a family member or loved one, natural disaster, or harassment.

English for Academic Purposes (EAP): A specialised form of Teaching English as a Second or Other Language (TESOL) which focuses on English used in higher education.

Orientation: A comprehensive introduction to MHE and its culture and services for all students, as well as finalising all administrative matters related to enrolment, which normally takes place in the week prior to a student's first class.

Special Needs: any medical, physical, mental or psychological condition which presents challenges to students and thus requires extra equipment or support in achieving students' goals.

Student Support Services: a range of assistance strategies designed to ameliorate issues which adversely affect a student's wellbeing and/or ability to apply themselves to their studies.

6. Policy

6.1 Overview of Policy

MHE will implement a range of support services designed to ensure that all students, regardless of their gender, cultural or ethnic background, physical, physiological or psychological condition, or sexual orientation, are safe, comfortable and able to fully participate in their studies. MHE recognises that there are specific challenges faced by overseas students which require the delivery of targeted support activities (e.g., for English language proficiency).

Where a student or group of students requires assistance due to a need related to their background, life context or medical condition, or any other reason, MHE will endeavour to supply appropriate support mechanisms and/or refer students to a relevant service provider.

6.2 Administration of Policy

The MHE Board of Directors is ultimately responsible for the safety and wellbeing of MHE students. Authority to provide these services is delegated to the Student Support Officer who reports to the CEO.

The Student Support Officer is required to submit an annual written report to the CEO and Board of Directors, which shall include as a minimum:

- Data, including trend data, indicating the demand for support services (internal and external);
- Data indicating the nature, sufficiency and effectiveness of support services offered; and,
- Areas of support that require improvement.

The Student Support Officer and CEO may also discuss as often as necessary, the implementation of procedures, proposed new services, withdrawal of existing services or feedback and complaints from students, which will all be used for the purpose of continuous improvement. Recommendations can be made to the Board of Directors at any time.

MHE respects students' rights to privacy and confidentiality. MHE will always treat students that seek and access support services for whatever reason with respect and dignity. Information about students collected by the Student Support Officer will not be used for any purpose other than accessing the service and will be treated with the utmost confidentiality in accordance with MHE policies and procedures.

7. Procedures

7.1 Introducing Support Services to Enrolling Students

All students are required to attend the MHE Orientation and to become familiar with the MHE Student Handbook before their first class. The Student Handbook outlines the range of student support services available and how these can be accessed. During the Orientation program, all new students will be given details of MHE support services via a presentation by the Student Support Officer and be provided with contact details for the Student Support Officer. (See Appendix A for details of Developing and Managing Student Support Plans (SSP))

During Orientation Week, the Student Support Officer will also provide an extra presentation for overseas students, explaining:

- adjustments to living away from home
- opening an Australian bank account
- Australian customs and etiquette
- NSW public transport (including how to obtain and use an Opal card and how to use the public transport website to check timetables and plan travel)
- Personal safety
- The emergency phone service, i.e., calling 000 for emergency police, ambulance or fire services
- Information on Australian working rights and conditions
- Student Visa requirements and conditions relating to enrolment eligibility, course progress, work conditions and health insurance
- Social activities organised by MHE for overseas students.

Student support services information will also be promoted on the MHE website and learning management system as well as on noticeboards around the MHE campus, including in student common areas and classrooms.

7.2 Accessing Student Support Services

In addition to Orientation week activities, the website, learning management system and campus signage, students will be made directly aware of the nature and range of support services available via academic and administrative staff. Staff induction will include training in recognising situations which may require referring students to the Student Support Officer. Academic or administrative staff may refer students to the Student Support Officer at any time.

Students may approach the Student Support Officer at any time during business hours to discuss their needs for support. The cost of access to MHE student welfare services is included in the MHE student fees unless clearly stated in the information provided in the Handbook and Orientation program. The Student Support Officer may help organise or book referrals to external support services, including but not limited to:

- Legal services:
 - Advocacy services
 - Visa advice
 - Taxation assistance, including applying for a Tax File Number
- Social services:
 - Workshops on introducing Australian culture, customs and etiquette
 - Interpersonal relationships, conflict management and resolution
 - Support for victims of bullying and harassment
 - Organised excursions and social activities, especially (but not exclusively) for overseas students
- Financial assistance:
 - Accommodation services
 - Assistance with finding casual work (e.g., CV writing workshops, access to job advertisements)
- Higher education support:
 - Student mentoring
 - Training workshops in research and study techniques (e.g., time management, motivation, setting and achieving goals)

- English language support
 - English conversation groups
 - English for Academic Purposes classes and workshops
- Language Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) support
 - Peer support group
 - Mathematical support by academic skills advisor
 - Mathematical support workshops
- Other personal support:
 - Medical care – general practitioners, clinics, dentists etc (at least one first aid officer will be present when the campus is open)
 - Psychological services
 - Trauma, crisis and grief counselling
 - Training workshops in self-care, stress management, physical exercise etc.

7.3 Special Needs for Reasonable Adjustment

Any student with special needs must make the nature of their need (with supporting documentation) known to the Student Support Officer as soon as possible. The Student Support Officer will then advise the Dean of the student's requirements and liaise with the Dean and academic staff to arrange the appropriate assistance. The Student Support Officer, Dean and all staff involved will respect and maintain the highest standards of confidentiality and respect the student's privacy at all times throughout this process. It is noted that reasonable adjustment may be arranged without the necessity to fully disclose to all parties, the nature of the student's condition. MHE will provide all reasonable adjustment to cater for the student's need, including assisting with the enrolment process, accessing course advice, studying, completing assessments and exams and accessing results.

MHE agrees to assess the student's needs in consultation with the student and, if applicable, their agent and/or representative and relevant medical professionals. MHE will take all reasonable action necessary to adjust classes and learning materials (including on-line resources) for students with special needs, including but not limited to:

- Auslan interpreters
- Supervisors and scribes
- Modifying the physical campus
- Changing font sizes in presentations
- Adjustments to presentation medium
- Assistive technology

The MHE community should be aware that any reasonable adjustment made is not designed to give the student who receives it an unfair advantage and that the knowledge, standards, outcomes and assessment results required to complete a unit successfully are the same for all students.

7.4 Academic Skills and English Language Support

Academic staff will be available for academic support related to a specific unit. In the first lecture or tutorial each semester, academic staff will inform students of the regular day(s) and time(s) of their availability, which will normally be a minimum of two hours per week. If mutually agreed, staff and students may also conduct virtual meetings. Online students may also arrange a virtual meeting with academic staff during these times, which will use the same software and protocols as their online classes.

Students may apply to the Academic Skills Advisor (ASA) to participate in weekly academic skills sessions which will cover topics such as study, research and referencing skills, academic integrity, assignment writing, exam preparation, time management and goal setting. Students may also be referred to these sessions by academic staff.

Notwithstanding MHE's strict English proficiency admission requirements, we recognise that students from non-English speaking backgrounds may require additional training in English language. Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) support will be available for students who need them. This support will be delivered by Academic Skills Advisor.

If students require general English or numeracy support, a referral to an English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students (ELICOS) or Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) provider may be considered. In such cases, if the nature of the issue is impacting on the student's progression, then the student's enrolment at MHE may be at risk and the Department of Home Affairs will be notified as necessary.

7.5 Counselling Services

MHE, through the Student Support Officer, will form contractual arrangements with qualified psychologists to offer counselling to students on campus and also via telehealth platforms.

Academic and administrative staff will be encouraged to identify students who need such support and refer them to counsellors as necessary. Counselling services include but are not limited to:

- Conflict resolution
- Stress and anxiety management
- Financial support
- Mental illness support
- Building self-confidence
- Emotional recovery from critical incidents

The MHE counselling service is not intended to be a mental health practice or to provide psychological assessment but may refer to an external psychological or mental health practice if such is deemed necessary.

7.6 Review of Study Arrangements

In cases of severe hardship or trauma, students may apply in writing to the Dean for a Review of Study Arrangements, which may comprise a deferment of their assessments, a temporary or permanent reduction of study load or a leave of absence. Such an application must include a clear, brief description of the cause of the hardship, how it affects the student and relevant documentary evidence, e.g., medical certificates, statutory declarations.

The Dean will make a decision on the application within 5 working days and respond in writing to the applicant. Until approval is granted in writing, the student must continue to make every effort to fulfil his or her current study load.

MHE recognises that there are some instances where a voluntary discontinuation/deferment of study, study load reduction and/or leave of absence is not sufficient for students who are experiencing acute, chronic or persistent wellbeing and safety issues.

An involuntary leave of absence may be imposed by the Dean if:

- medical evidence regarding the student's wellbeing and/or safety indicates that the student is not currently fit to continue their enrolment; and
- there are no reasonable adjustments that can be made; and
- the student is unwilling to engage with support services or access leave of absence, deferment or study load reduction provisions; or
- the student's behaviour or condition poses a serious concern for the welfare or safety of either themselves or others and/or is disruptive to the community in which they are learning.

The length of the involuntary leave of absence is at the discretion of the Dean and informed by medical evidence within the following guidelines:

- normally a maximum period of up to 3 standard trimesters (equivalent to 1 calendar year); and,
- the period of the absence continues to allow the student sufficient time to complete the program within the maximum period.

The length of an involuntary leave of absence will be determined based on all information made available to MHE regarding the wellbeing and/or safety concerns including, but not limited to:

- information maintained by the Student Support Officer;
- medical evidence provided to MHE;
- information provided by the affected student (including medical information); or
- information provided by staff members and information on the student record.

A return to study may require the student meeting conditions imposed by the Dean such as but not limited to medical evidence supporting a return to study and/or agreement to strategies for self-care and monitoring including accessing support services.

7.7 Computers and IT support

Computers will be available in the library during library operation hours. The computers may only be used for academic related purposes such as research, completing assessments, sending and receiving MHE emails and accessing the learning management system. Students may contact the MHE IT staff for assistance if required.

7.8 Miscellaneous services

Employment coaching, on subjects such as CV writing, job interview preparation and presentation and cold canvassing will be available for students approaching graduation. The Student Support Officer will be available to provide this service to the students.

Excursions, sports activities and opportunities for socialising will be organised periodically, especially but not exclusively for overseas students. There may or may not be a fee for attendance at such activities, depending on the nature of the activity. These will be promoted on the MHE website and on noticeboards around the campus.

Students and staff will be encouraged to contribute articles to a student newsletter to be published by student volunteers.

8. Relevant Legislation and Regulations

MHE acknowledges its legal and regulatory obligations under the following frameworks:

- Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) 2021
- Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Framework 2013

9. Policy Administration

Policy category	Governance
Policy owner	Academic Board
Responsible officer	Student Support Officer
Approving authority	Academic Board
Contact officer	Student Administration Manager
Approval date	11 th March 2022
Commencement date	11 th March 2022
Review date	Three years
Version	1.5
Related documents	Academic Language and Learning Support Policy & Procedures Student Counselling Policy & Procedures Guidance Notes for Academic Staff to Assist Them to Determine Reasonable Adjustment.

10. Version control and change history

Version	Approval date	Approved by	Summary of changes
1.1	10 th December 2021	Academic Board	
1.2	21 st January 2022	Academic Board	To combine the Student Welfare Policy and Procedures and the Student Services Framework into a single document called the Student Support Framework, adding a staff member as the first contact for students who need support and a clear statement about preserving
1.3	11 th March 2022	Academic Board	Revised and combined policy and procedure called Student Support Framework.
1.4	13 th April 2022	Academic Board	Change title "Wellness Counsellor" to "Student Support Officer", expand list of students who may encounter discrimination, make the Student Support Officer the first point of call for requests for reasonable adjustment, stress confidentiality in reasonable adjustment
1.5	10 th August 2023	Academic Board	Delete reference to Academic Language Support Officer Attach Developing and Managing Student Support Plans Added as a related document Guidance Notes for Academic Staff to Assist Them to Determine Reasonable Adjustment.

11. Reference / Benchmark

- Australian School of Accounting
Student-Support-Framework_V2.0.pdf (asahe.edu.au)

- Lloyds College
College Student Services – Lloyds International College (lloydscollege.nsw.edu.au)
- Ozford Institute of Higher Education
Microsoft Word - Student Support and Services Procedures EMT Final.docx (ozford.edu.au)

12. Appendix A Developing and Managing Student Support Plans

The Student Support Plan (SSP) is a document which sets out the reasons for and nature of academic support to be provided to students (such as study planning, reading and notetaking for assignments, or academic writing) and any reasonable adjustments recommended for a student in order to meet the principles established in the *Equity and Diversity Policy*.

The SSP is normally prepared by the Student Support Officer in collaboration with the student, the Academic Skills Advisor and may also involve lecturers if required. In determining the varying levels of need as well as the nature of the support provided, MHE is cognisant that some groups of students may have specific needs related to their cultural background and/or history of social disadvantage (e.g., Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) that may adversely impact on their participation/engagement and consequently, their completion. The Student Support Plan:

- describes the impact the specific learning need and/or disability has on the student's study, based on their perspective, evidence and lecturer observations;
- should consider cultural and social disadvantage impacts on the student experience and the nature of the support provided;
- lists recommendations for academic support and adjustments as needed relating to following areas: teaching and learning; practical classes, access and orientation; IT and library services; examinations;
- contains only those details necessary to be known by those staff involved in supporting the student;
- only includes medical or other personal details relevant to understanding the impact of the disability or learning need; and,
- gives details of the student's consent to share information, and any restrictions.

Where reasonable adjustments are put in place, the SSP will normally be shared with relevant staff such as the lecturers, the Librarian, and the Student Administration Manager. Please note that it may not be necessary to provide the entire SSP to lecturers or divulge to them who the student is or the nature of the impairment. A considerate and informed approach is important in deciding what those involved in providing support need to know in order to make the necessary adjustments. Information on the impact of the impairment on study in the SSP will be particularly helpful for lecturers, and when it is shared appropriately, the student does not have to explain the impact of their impairment and the importance of a particular adjustment to each lecturer in every class. Students can share information about their disability/learning need with lecturers and others, but this is their choice. Staff may also need to be provided as needed, general information sources about the nature of a particular disability and/or learning need.

The Student Support Officer is responsible for overall coordination of the implementation of support and adjustments as well as the direct provision of support to the student. The Academic Skills Advisor takes the lead in providing academic support.

The Student Support Officer is also responsible for monitoring student progress and should check academic monitoring data to review whether progress is as expected and encourage academic staff to advise of any issues which might require further interventions. The frequency of monitoring should be proportionate to the complexity of the student's needs but would commonly occur during regular meetings with the student and as a minimum, at the conclusion of each teaching period. Please note that the SSP is a working document and can be amended when needed.