

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE WRITING OF REFERENCES FOR STUDENTS**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 These guidelines list the different types of reference produced by the University of Salford for students, outline the contents of these references and provide guidance for academic members of staff when writing personal references.
- 1.2 The University of Salford provides three types of reference for students:
- Confirmation of award of degree or other qualification
  - Factual reference
  - Personal reference

### **2. Confirmation of graduation**

- 2.1 The Student Information Directorate will routinely provide on request the following details on alumni:
- Programme of study
  - Award made (including classification)
  - Date of award
- 2.2 This will be the case, except where individuals have requested for their personal information to be kept confidential. Generally, if a student appears in a Graduation Programme they have not objected to the release of their personal information.

### **3. Factual Reference**

- 3.1 The Student Information Directorate will provide a more comprehensive reference listing material held on the Student Information System on receipt of a signed *Disclosure of Personal Information* Form. The form is available on the Data Protection website:  
<http://www.isd.salford.ac.uk/governance/legislation/dataprot>
- 3.2 If a request for a reference is received by the Student Information Directorate, a *Disclosure of Personal Information* Form will be sent to the requester of the request. This form must be signed by the requester and the individual about whom the information is requested and be accompanied by an official request on organisational headed paper or other similar stationery. Other organisations' forms will be accepted provided the form states that the information disclosed will be held by them in accordance with the Act.

### **4. Personal reference**

- 4.1 Where a student and a member of academic staff have made an agreement that academic member of staff may make a reference which covers both academic information and personal views on that student such as the suitability of that student for the job in question.
- 4.2 It is understood that this type of reference is likely to be the most common type of reference issued by the University but should the academic leave the University or decide that they do not wish to issue a reference, the only type of alternative reference will be one of the two listed above.
- 4.3 Requests for such references should be made directly to the academic member of staff except where a School policy provides for such a reference automatically.

- 4.4 If a request for a personal reference has been refused on grounds that the student considers unreasonable, s/he should contact the Head of School or the Progression Team Leader, Student Information Management Directorate. The facts of the case will be considered and an assessment made of whether alternative arrangements to provide a personal reference can be made.

## 5. Guidance for the writing of personal references

- 5.1 This guidance is intended for academic members of staff who are asked to write references for students they have taught or supervised.

- 5.2 The principal aims of a reference are:

- to confirm facts: i.e. to confirm the accuracy of statements made in an application
- to provide opinions: i.e. to give the referee's opinion as to a candidate's suitability for the post/course in question, and his/her potential for the future

- 5.3 In writing a reference the following points should be noted:

- a) You have a duty of care to the subject and if a reference is provided for a student which is false, the person giving it may be liable for:
  - defamation in the form of malicious falsehood
  - deceit, if a false statement is knowingly made
  - negligence, if the provider of the reference fails to take reasonable care in its preparation.
- b) References are not, in the main, confidential. If subject to a request under the Data Protection Act, references will usually be released. Therefore you should not write anything you are not prepared for the subject of the reference to see.
- c) Please ensure that you have all the up to date, relevant information requested to hand, the Student Information Directorate or your own admin staff will be able to confirm results etc.
- d) You should endeavour to provide a fair and balanced reference in all cases and should always avoid coded language.
- e) Ensure the facts are accurate and complete, and where you give opinions, these should be stated as such, separate from the facts and only stated where they can be supported.
- f) In those circumstances where an opinion is requested, but knowledge is limited, e.g. in the area of honesty; such wording as "I know of nothing which would lead me to doubt X's honesty" should be used.
- g) Oral references are subject to the same legal rules as for written references. If giving a reference by telephone take all reasonable steps to ensure that the person making the request for the reference is who they say they are and that they have legitimate grounds for making the request. Limit the information given to facts and follow immediately with a written reference confirming what you have said.
- h) Place a copy of each reference you give on the appropriate student file.

## 6. Private references

- 6.1 There may be occasions where students and staff members are acquainted in a private capacity (eg members of clubs and or societies) where a student may request and the academic member of staff agrees that he/she will in his/her private capacity, provide a reference for the student.

- 6.2 Requests for such references should be made directly to the academic at their personal address.

- 6.3 Private references are not references given by or on behalf of the University and must not, under any circumstance:

be given using University headed paper  
contain any personal data obtained from University records.

6.4 The academic member of staff must include a statement that the reference is given in a personal capacity and not on behalf of the University.