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Academic Flexibility Framework for Student-Athletes

Introduction and Rationale

Oxford Brookes University has a strong commitment to supporting student-athletes in balancing the demands of academic study alongside high-performance sport. As a Dual Career Accredited institution, the University recognises the importance of creating an environment in which students can succeed both academically and athletically.

This proposal supports the vision of the Sport and Active Wellness Directorate to Move, Succeed, Belong, recognising the important role that sport and physical activity plays in enabling students to thrive both within and beyond their academic studies. It also reflects the Directorate's commitment to embedding its core values of Integrity & Purpose, Pride & Respect, and Community & Inclusivity across all programmes and services, ensuring that student support is equitable, transparent, and centred on student success.

Academic flexibility is already established at a number of UK universities supporting student-athletes through a dual-career approach. Institutions including the University of Bath, Cardiff Metropolitan University and Loughborough University all have mechanisms in place to provide appropriate flexibility around academic commitments where these are impacted by high performance sport. Developing a clear and consistent approach at Oxford Brookes would therefore support our position as a Dual Career Accredited institution, ensure we remain competitive with the wider sector, and provide student-athletes and academic colleagues with greater clarity around the support available. By strengthening support for student-athletes, Oxford Brookes University can further enhance both the student experience and institutional outcomes while reinforcing its commitment to dual career excellence.

Currently, there is no standardised institutional framework to ensure consistent support for all student-athletes within identified performance programmes, including rowing, cricket, climbing, and scholarship athletes. As a result, the level of academic flexibility and support available can vary significantly between courses and departments.

This proposal outlines the development of an Academic Flexibility Framework to provide a consistent, transparent, and student-centred approach across the University, enabling student-athletes to excel in both their academic and sporting pursuits. In doing so, the Framework seeks to position Oxford Brookes University as a sector leading institution in dual career support, enhancing the student experience while contributing to the University's ambitions for student success, wellbeing, inclusion, retention, graduate outcomes, and institutional reputation, and thereby potentially improved recruitment.

1. Eligibility

1.1 Academic flexibility is available to student-athletes participating in recognised dual-career pathways at Oxford Brookes University.

1.2 Eligible student-athletes include:

- Student-athletes within the identified Performance Clubs (Cricket, Climbing and Rowing) who are part of the performance team and designated as lead athletes by the relevant Head Coach. Membership of a Performance Club alone does not automatically confer eligibility.
- Scholarship Athletes.
- TASS athletes.
- National or International student-athletes

2. Purpose

2.1 The purpose of Academic Flexibility is to enable eligible student-athletes to balance the demands of high-performance sport alongside their academic studies.

2.2 The framework policy provides reasonable flexibility where sporting commitments significantly impact academic engagement while maintaining academic standards, programme learning outcomes and fairness for all students.

3. Academic Flexibility

3.1 Academic Flexibility will be considered on an individual basis, taking account of the student-athlete's sporting commitments, programme requirements and the need to maintain academic standards. Academic Flexibility can be classified as Routine Flexibility or Formal Flexibility

Routine flexibility

- **Timetable adjustments:** Where possible, allocation to an alternative existing seminar or teaching group to accommodate recognised competition or training commitments. Where attendance cannot reasonably be accommodated, access to recorded lectures, where available.
- **Early completion or release of an assessment:** Where appropriate, assessment activities such as practical assessments, presentations or laboratory activities may be completed earlier, where this can be accommodated within the course requirements.

Formal Flexibility:

- **Coursework extensions:** Students may apply for an extension of up to one week where recognised competition or training requirements significantly affect their ability to complete an assessment within the standard timeframe.
- **Alternative examination arrangements:** Where recognised competition or training commitments conflict with a scheduled examination, students may apply for an alternative examination date or other appropriate adjustment, subject to the relevant University approval process.

3.2 The examples above are not exhaustive. Other reasonable adjustments may be considered where appropriate, provided they are consistent with programme requirements, University regulations and the maintenance of academic standards.

4. Request Process

4.1 Annual Registration

Eligible student-athletes must complete the Academic Flexibility Google Form at the start of each academic year to register their interest in accessing Academic Flexibility. Once submissions have been reviewed, the Head of Sport Support will confirm eligibility and share a list of approved student-athletes with the Student Investigation Resolution Team (SIRT) and the relevant programme director for each student-athlete.

4.2 Supporting Evidence

If supporting evidence is required, students should contact the Head of Sport Support in the first instance. The Head of Sport Support will provide a supporting letter, which should accompany any request submitted to the relevant academic department.

4.3 Timing of Requests

Student-athletes should discuss anticipated academic flexibility requirements as early as possible once they become aware of a potential clash between academic and sporting commitments. Early communication with module lead and academic advisor and/or other appropriate members of staff will increase the likelihood that reasonable adjustments can be considered and implemented in a timely manner.

Where a student-athlete requires a coursework extension, they should submit a Type C Exceptional Circumstances request as soon as possible and, wherever practicable, before the assessment deadline. Requests should be supported by a letter from the Head of Sport Support.

Requests for academic flexibility submitted at short notice may limit the options available to support the student and may not be approved where there is insufficient

time to consider and implement appropriate arrangements. The University cannot guarantee that requests received shortly before, or after, an affected teaching activity, assessment, or submission deadline will be accommodated.

Student-athletes are expected to communicate proactively throughout the academic year and provide as much notice as reasonably possible for all foreseeable sporting commitments, including competitions, training camps and representative activities.

5. Coursework Extensions

5.1 Where a coursework extension of up to one week is required, students should submit a Type C Exceptional Circumstances request, supported by a letter from the Head of Sport Support.

5.2 Requests for routine flexibility, such as attending an alternative seminar or making attendance arrangements, should be agreed with the relevant member of staff. For example, Programme Director, Module Lead or Academic Advisor.

6. Student Responsibilities

6.1 Student-athletes remain responsible for maintaining engagement with their academic studies and completing all required assessments.

6.2 Students are responsible for catching up on any teaching, learning activities or assessment preparation missed due to approved sporting commitments.

6.3 Student-athletes are expected to communicate proactively with academic staff and the Head of Sport Support throughout the academic year to ensure potential issues are identified and managed at the earliest opportunity.

6.4 Where additional support is required beyond Academic Flexibility, students should seek advice from their Academic Advisor, Student Support Services or, where appropriate, submit an Exceptional Circumstances request through the University's EC process.

7. University Responsibilities

7.1 The University will consider all requests for Academic Flexibility fairly, consistently and on a case-by-case basis.

7.2 The University will work collaboratively with student-athletes, academic staff and the Head of Sport Support to identify reasonable adjustments where possible.

7.3 While Oxford Brookes University is committed to supporting eligible student-athletes, Academic Flexibility cannot be guaranteed. Decisions will be subject to programme requirements, professional body regulations where applicable, and the

need to maintain academic integrity, academic standards and fairness for all students.

7.4 Where a student-athlete already has an Individual Support Plan (ISP), any existing assessment adjustments will be taken into consideration when considering their eligibility for additional flexibility under this policy. An ISP may already provide sufficient flexibility to support the student-athlete's dual-career commitments, in which case an additional one-week extension may not be required or granted. Where the existing adjustments are not considered sufficient to accommodate recognised competition or training commitments, an additional one-week extension may be considered on a case-by-case basis. The student will be notified of the outcome following review of their completed Google Form.