

Centre for the Evaluation of Access Participation
and Student Success (CEAPSS)

Academic Advising Policy: APP evaluation 2025/26

Evaluation report: process and early insights

August 2026

Approved for external circulation

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Background and introduction

In 2023, Oxford Brookes launched a new Academic Advising policy committing a minimum of two hours of academic advising per academic year as part of the teaching timetable. The policy was intended to deliver the strategic aim of Academic Advising at Brookes: “to achieve a high-quality and inclusive academic support system which engages students”. There have been several developments to academic advising since the policy launch in 2023:

- A process for referring students to support services and wellbeing;
- An Academic Advising Curriculum to provide a framework for academic advising conversations across the student lifecycle;
- Mandatory CPD and training for advisors;
- A student-facing Academic Advising campaign; and
- Training in the use of learning analytics to support Academic Advising conversations.

The Oxford Brookes Access and Participation Plan (APP) includes a commitment to evaluate the Academic Advising policy, acknowledging the importance of this core University project for mitigating equality of opportunity risks and for achieving the aims of the APP.

Primary risks identified in the APP	Other risks	Relevant APP Objectives
R2: Knowledge, skills and experience R5: Student support R6: Mental health	R4: Belonging and shaping R7: Affordability	O2: To improve continuation rates for students from IMDQ1+2 postcodes O3: To increase the proportion of students from IMD Q1+Q2 postcodes who are awarded a 2:1 or above O4: To increase the proportion of Black and Asian students who are awarded a 2:1 or above

This report covers delivery of the Academic Advising Policy in the first year of the current APP and presents indicative evidence of early impacts on the student experience. Further reports will provide annual evaluation updates in line with the University's APP commitments.

Aims and objectives

The principal aim of the study is to evaluate the Academic Advising Policy from an APP perspective. It is concerned with the effectiveness of academic and pastoral support particularly in relation to students identified within our APP and specifically mental health. In terms of pastoral support, the focus is on evaluating the impact of our processes to ensure that Academic Advisors know when, who and how to refer students on to University support services.

Following the phased approach to evaluation set out in the APP, this initial stage explores processes: How is the policy designed and implemented from the perspective of students? and indicative impact: What difference is it making? Later phases of the evaluation will provide more comprehensive assessments of impact.

The current evaluation objectives are to:

- Understand students' experiences of academic advising following policy implementation;
- Provide indicative early insights into impacts; and
- Make recommendations to inform the design and delivery of Academic Advising to support the achievement of APP objectives.

A collaborative approach has been taken throughout, with the evaluation developed in partnership with the Academic Advising project team.

Methodology

The evaluation draws on a range of existing sources of evidence through a documentary review and analysis of institutional survey metrics. To provide additional insight, and specifically to gain the perspective of students who may face greater challenges with study and university life, a set of in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted by the Impact Evaluation and Insight Team during Summer 2025.

Students eligible for an interview were undergraduate, UK domiciled, campus-based, had engaged with the Academic Advising process during the previous two years, and had also received a contextual offer pre-entry. The contextual offer criterion was used as a proxy indicator to identify students who may be more likely to face challenges with study or university life.

Eight interviews¹, each lasting approximately one hour, were conducted using an interview guide designed around the Academic Advising principles set out in the policy. Participants

¹ Following a low response to the interview invitation, potentially due to timing, the evaluation and core project team agreed to stop data collection at eight interviews to enable reporting.

included students from each of the four (old) faculties, and represented a range of characteristics in terms of sex, age, ethnicity, IMD quintile and disability status.

At this stage, evidence of the impact of the new policy is captured through institutional survey metrics.

Findings

Student perspectives

- **Perceived direction of travel:** Overall, interview data indicate an improving Academic Advising experience, supported by positive reflections from students who had experienced the process both pre- and post-policy implementation.
- **Understanding of Academic Advising:** Participants' understanding of Academic Advising broadly aligns with policy. A clear understanding of the role and purpose of advising and tutorials can unlock greater value and improve equity.
- **The student experience:** Proactive communication from programme teams and advisors was consistent across the sample. Advising formats and content vary with one-to-one tutorials thought to provide greater scope for personalisation with group sessions valued for building community with peers.
- **Importance of relationships:** Genuine rapport and trust, often developed over time, are a critical factor in well-functioning advisor relationships. Advisor proximity to current modules and assignments is also highly valued.
- **Personalised support:** A key factor in personalised support is the ability of advisors to handle diverse needs, alongside capacity in the advising process to accommodate complex personal challenges without limiting the core, more study-oriented and reflective elements of academic advising.
- **Student information sharing:** Students appreciate not having to recount personal circumstances and challenges to different staff and teams across the University.

Reflections from student interviews:

“Back in the one-on-one session in Year one, I didn't have a clear focus for what I wanted to get out of the session. But at the same time, neither did the Academic Advisor. [In year 2] “It was definitely more of a conversation which was really helpful, more just asking about how did you find last semester? What did you find difficult? Your grades seem fine, but was there anything that you found difficult in a certain subject? ... [N]ow that I look back on it, it was structured”

“I've been signposted a lot more this year. I don't remember much from last year”

“I've got the impression that she kind of knows generally where I'm at. I don't know if she knows the specifics but she seems to kind of know that things are on track and kind of going okay academically”

Indicative impact on students

Institutional survey metrics provide an indicative insight to impact on students:

- In 2024, student satisfaction with academic support (National Student Survey (NSS) data) met the sector benchmark of 85% and has improved annually since. The Brookes Student Survey (BSS) data reflect a steeper rate of improvement.
- Oxford Brookes moved up three rank places (NSS data) for academic support between 2025 and 2026.
- Satisfaction with advisor contact (NSS and BSS data) suggests a substantial improvement with the 2026 figure up 24 percentage points from the 2020 baseline of 48%. However, it is important to recognise that the 2020 Pulse survey was taken during the heat of the pandemic.

	2020	2023	2024	2025	2026
NSS Academic Support (average)		84%	85%	88%	90%
BSS Academic Support (average)		81%	88%	89%	89%
NSS (optional question) Advisor Contact Satisfaction			72%	73%	73%
BSS Advisor Contact Satisfaction (2020 was a Pulse survey)	48%		71%	70%	72%

Recommendations

The recommendations included here are specifically geared to help optimise Academic Advising as a tool for achieving equitable student outcomes:

1. Support personalisation with information sharing and consider how to ensure all policy aspirations are covered for students with specific or complex needs.

2. Further boost student understanding of the role and purpose of Academic Advising to leverage impact.
3. Consider advising formats incorporating group and one-to-one tutorials.

Conclusions

The launch of the policy in 2023 has brought about significant enhancements to Academic Advising in terms of processes to support Advisors in referring students to student support and wellbeing, CPD and training, an Academic Advising Curriculum and campaign to promote Academic Advising to students. Both qualitative student data and quantitative institutional metrics demonstrate sustained improvements.

Looking ahead, maintaining an explicit student equity lens remains essential to ensure Academic Advising effectively supports individuals with complex or diverse needs. The three first-year evaluation recommendations are designed to help secure this equitable delivery while remaining realistic about strategic and operational circumstances.

Centre for the Evaluation of Access Participation and Student Success (CEAPSS)

The Centre for the Evaluation of Access, Participation and Student Success (CEAPSS, pronounced keeps) supports the development of impact evaluation and practice across Oxford Brookes University (OBU) with specific focus on supporting the aims and commitments set out in our institutional Access and Participation Plan. CEAPSS is the home of the Impact Evaluation and Insight Team, Student Outcomes, who work to support colleagues involved in delivering the Access and Participation Plan with evaluation practice, and to understand the impact of activities and practice on students across all stages of their journey to and through higher education.

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