**ADVICE ON SECURING REFERENCES FROM ACADEMIC STAFF**

**SUMMARY**

* Never make a general request for a person to act as a referee for you; reference requests should always relate to specific jobs or courses
* Make initial contact with your proposed referee, sending all necessary material, including your transcripts, CV, and job/course description
* Allow adequate time for your proposed referee to consider your request and respond prior to job/course application deadlines
* Await for confirmation that this person will agree to be your referee
* Make it easy for the referee. Offer them advance information on dates and formats of references required to ensure that they are submitted on time. Make sure you have offered some relevant career information that allows the person to write the reference

**SOME NOTES AND GUIDANCE ON ASKING STAFF, LECTURERS, OTHERS FOR REFERENCES**

A letter of reference is a document in which the writer assesses the qualities, characteristics, and capabilities of the person being recommended in terms of that individual's ability to perform a particular task or function. Recommendation letters are usually specifically requested to be written about someone, and are therefore addressed to a particular requester (such as a new employer, university admissions officer, etc.), although they may also be issued to the person being recommended without specifying an addressee.

1. **REQUESTING A REFERENCE**

Staff members may be willing to provide a reference for you, particularly if you are well known to them as perhaps a project supervisor or in their capacity of course director. There is no duty on any staff member to provide a reference and it is a mistake to presume that a staff member will be willing to provide a reference. It is important therefore that you ask staff members **BEFORE** you provide their name as a reference to any third party. That is **YOU** must ensure staff are willing to write the reference in advance of giving their name. **Sending an email notifying someone that you have given their name does not suffice nor does it indicate they have agreed.** If you send an email request, you need to wait for the affirmative reply. You need to follow up with a reminder or a phone call if you have not heard.

Of course when you request a reference you want that reference to be positive. And to secure a place on a sought after programme, or a competitive role you need to make sure your reference is positive. This has a number of knock-on implications

1. You should only ask people to write a reference if you are confident that they have a positive opinion of your work as an undergraduate.
2. You should respect the, time, effort, and work that writing a reference is likely to place on a staff member. You must ask the staff member directly. Requests via administrative staff, mutual acquaintances, *et cetera,* do not reflect well on you and are likely to leave a negative impression at just the wrong moment.
3. Some students ask for references a year or two (or even many) years after they have left the department. In cases such as these, it will be particularly important to reconnect with staff members to ensure that they are available to write a reference. You should not presume that because they said “Yes” in 2016 they are happy to write a reference in 2018. And you may need to remind them who you are; we have lots of students and sometimes memories need to be jogged. In these cases it is particularly important to phone or email- and office hours are publicly available on the web- so you can figure out the right time to phone.
4. **AFTER THE PERSON HAS AGREED TO WRITE THE REFERENCE**

Recommendation letters are usually specifically requested to be written about someone, and are therefore addressed to a particular requester (such as a new employer, university admissions officer, etc.), although they may also be issued to the person being recommended without specifying an addressee. You referee should be very clear about the type of reference you need. If the reference has a deadline, you are advised to make the process as easy as possible for your referee if you want to make that deadline.

1. Inform your referees early and then remind them when the deadlines begin to approach. If you are concerned they are not paying attention or have forgotten- telephone. Repeated emails are not likely to help the situation.
2. Inform any referee as early as possible of the deadline. This will mean they know it is coming up and it will not come as a nasty surprise.
3. Students often apply to many programmes at the same time. Each of these programmes will ask for different kinds of information presented in different kinds of ways. You need to understand what each programme wants and communicate this information to your referees, before contacting them. Do not make your referees figure it out for you. Some programmes require referees to fill in a form and include it with their reference letters; others do not require such a form. Some are online now, while others are not. You need to read over all the instructions to referees, fill in your personal information on forms, provide addressed and stamped envelopes when necessary, and provide any other kind of assistance that will help your referee manage your letters as easily as possible.
4. Each programme will have slightly different deadlines. Do not tell a referee about applications one by one; please identify the programmes you want to apply for and then tell your referee what is required along with the due dates (for example, 6 programmes with deadlines ranging from 15 December to 15 January).
5. **THE CONTENT OF THE REFRENCE**

In order to write a good reference letter, the referee needs to know what you are applying for, why you chose that particular program, how it fits to your experience and career goals, and so forth. Staff will often know a lot about your academic performance, your QCA, your ability to conduct a research project, *et cetera*, but may not know anything at all about your volunteer work with the Samaritans, your sports achievements, or other notable and commendable things you have achieved that are highly relevant to your application. This is important for all students seeking references but becomes more and more important as the gap between graduation and the date of writing the letter of reference grows. As a rule, provide as much information as possible to your referees, including your exam results in their modules, your degree result, and any other information you would like them to highlight.

So if you want a strong letter of recommendation

1. I need to address your performance at UL in my reference letter
   1. Tell your referee your QCA and also areas of particular strength that you think are relevant to the course you are now applying for. Tell the referee the strengths on your transcript that you think are worthy of mention.
   2. If there are weaknesses in your transcript, explain them. Employers and reference readers infer things from that which is not said.
2. A strong letter will have evidence that the referee knows the student well. If you have important voluntary experience – remind your referee that you would like it mentioned. Offer a brief outline of and why it is relevant to the course or job you are applying for.
3. If you have relevant research experience or you worked with a referee on a research project, remind them what you did, and what you learned. Staff supervise more than 10 projects every year so if you did an FYP or MRP with your referee, you will need to remind them what it was or is about
4. Many applications ask for an explanation of why you are applying to their programme. Share this with your referee.