

# Academic and Pastoral Support Policy



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## Purpose of Policy

The aim of this document is to set out the academic and pastoral support available to students across the University, including the Personal Tutor system.

## Overview

The University is committed to providing its students with effective academic and pastoral support. The aim is to ensure that students have access to a framework of support that builds on best practice, meets the needs of students, and is of a quality and consistency appropriate to a university of high global standing. The framework is designed to provide consistent quality of provision, while also helping students to monitor their progress and performance more systematically and relate these to their longer-term aspirations. It blends a clear set of University-wide requirements, well-understood by all students and staff, with scope for Colleges and Schools to tailor provision to reflect differences.

## Scope: Mandatory Policy

This policy applies to all staff in roles where they support students and to all taught students.

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## Document control

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**Approving authority** Senate Education Committee

**Consultation undertaken** Learning and Teaching Committee, Colleges, the Enhancing Student Support Project Board, Human Resources

**Section responsible for policy maintenance & review** Academic Services

**Related policies, procedures, guidelines & regulations** School Personal Tutoring Statement Template

**Policies superseded by this policy** Academic and Pastoral Support at Edinburgh Standards and Guiding Principles  
Roles and Responsibilities within the Personal Tutor System

**Alternative format** If you require this document in an alternative format please email [Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk) or telephone 0131 650 2138.

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# Academic and Pastoral Support Policy

## 1. Introduction

The University operates a framework of academic and pastoral support for students which constitutes a blend of localised provision within Schools and Colleges, the Personal Tutor System and student support services.

See also: [Dignity and Respect Policy](#)

## 2. Accountability and Provision of Support

The way in which academic and pastoral support for students is provided may vary between Schools. Overall responsibility rests with each Head of School to ensure that an appropriate framework of support is in place and working well.

Similarly Colleges, through their Deans of Students and Deans of Learning and Teaching (or equivalent) and their Learning and Teaching Committees (or equivalent), are responsible for overseeing the quality of provision of academic and pastoral support across Schools. Job descriptions and committee remits must reflect this.

Academic and pastoral support within a School or College must provide for all its students. Each School must inform the students taking its courses and programmes about the academic and pastoral support available to them and how to access it (reference: [Programme and Course Handbook Policy](#)). Schools are also expected to identify when and where the need for targeted support may be at its most acute and to concentrate provision accordingly.

Within each School, there must be a readily accessible, student-facing office as the primary point of contact for students seeking advice and information. This office must ensure that students' enquiries or requests are dealt with promptly and courteously and, that where necessary, students are directed to the appropriate member of staff or source of information.

## 3. The Personal Tutor System

### 3.1 Summary

Within Schools and Colleges, the Personal Tutoring (PT) system is a key element of academic and pastoral support to undergraduate and taught postgraduate students. The Personal Tutor (PT) is a key role and every undergraduate and taught postgraduate student must have a PT. This is a member of teaching staff who provides a readily accessible, primary point of contact for academic guidance and pastoral support (signposting to student support services), to help tutees reflect on their academic progress and get the most out of their studies. They will help their Tutees to take an active partnership approach to learning.

Each School has a Senior Tutor (ST) to ensure that PTs are adequately supported and to ensure that the PT system is operating effectively and consistently across the School.

Each College has a Dean of Students with responsibility for oversight of student support in the College.

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Within each School, support for students, PTs and STs is provided via a Student Support Team (SST), consisting of Student Support Officers (SSOs) or equivalents. The SST provides students with a further first point of contact. SSTs will also provide advice on the wider network of student support services at the University to help students have the best possible experience during their studies.

Each School must publish and maintain a School Personal Tutoring Statement outlining the way in which the PT system operates within that School and meets the University's standards and expectations for the Personal Tutor system.

Further information on each role in the Personal Tutor system and their responsibilities is detailed in Personal Tutor System Roles and Responsibilities (see Appendix).

## 3.2 Meeting Requirements

The minimum requirement for meetings scheduled by the PT/School is:

### *Undergraduate*

- Year 1 – four meetings (at least two of which must be individual meetings between the PT and tutee)
- Year 2 – three meetings (at least one of which must be an individual meeting between the PT and tutee)
- Years 3 & 4 (and 5 where required) – one meeting each year (the form of delivery will be determined by School).

### *Postgraduate Taught*

- Taught part of programme – four meetings (at least two of which must be individual meetings between the PT and tutee – the form of delivery for the other two meetings will be determined by the School)
- Research part of programme – one individual meeting between the PT and tutee

### *Purpose of Scheduled Meetings*

- Students should be actively encouraged to request additional meetings with their Personal Tutor as required throughout their time at the University.
- Meetings with students who are not on campus (e.g. studying abroad for a period, or on placement, or studying an online degree) may take place by telephone or online/digital tool. Email exchanges are not considered to be meetings unless they take place within a pre-agreed timeframe to enable a "conversation".
- The minimum meeting requirements should be adjusted pro rata for part time students and accordingly for non-standard programmes.

## 3.3 Monitoring and Review

Schools must have in place effective mechanisms for the monitoring and review of academic and pastoral support to ensure the adequacy of support arrangements and that appropriate action is taken to address issues raised. Schools must also meet any specific University requirements.

Monitoring of the quality of provision of academic and pastoral support across Schools must be complemented by the use of staff review procedures (e.g. annual review).

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## 3.4 Briefing, Training and Development

An effective framework of support depends on the knowledge and skills of all staff who have responsibility for providing information and guidance. For briefing and training this is a shared responsibility between Schools, Colleges, support services and Edinburgh University Students' Association. Schools and Colleges must therefore ensure that adequate opportunities are in place for briefing, training and development, and that these opportunities are taken. All Schools will offer a training session for Personal Tutors and Student Support Teams at the start of each academic session. Formal training opportunities will be supplemented by informal training and mentorship/ongoing training. It is particularly important that consideration is given to the growing diversity of the University's students and staff.

## 4. Limits of Pastoral Support Responsibilities

While PTs and other academic and administrative staff have a responsibility for supporting students, they are not expected to provide specialist pastoral care and should not attempt to do so.

Consequently, in cases where a student appears to be experiencing severe distress (e.g. serious physical or mental health problems), they should be encouraged to seek appropriate professional help.

It may occasionally be necessary for School staff to establish explicit boundaries, especially if the student is reluctant to seek professional support or if their behaviour is having a disruptive effect on others. The Head of School (or their delegate) and the relevant College Dean must be consulted in such cases.

### *Confidentiality*

Where a member of staff is concerned about the wellbeing of a student they may want to share personal information about the student with relevant staff whose role is to provide support in such circumstances. Similarly, staff may wish to share personal information about a student with a third party, because of significant concerns regarding the person's wellbeing. Any such actions should be made in accordance with the University's Data Protection policies.

### *Relevant guidance and policies*

- [Helping Distressed Students](#)
- [Support for Study Policy](#)
- Fitness to Practice (request from relevant College Office)
- [Student Support Services](#)

## 5. Student Support Services

A wide range of student support, in academic, pastoral, administrative and domestic areas, is made available to students through student support services, which complement provision in Schools and Colleges. The effectiveness of these services, and the cohesion between them and the wider academic University community, are fundamental to a high quality student experience.

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## *Expectations and Standards*

Providers of support services to students are expected to make clear, through a range of appropriate channels:

- the services and support they offer
- who can access these services
- an initial point of contact and advice on the best method of communication

Services must:

- Deal with requests and enquiries accurately, promptly and efficiently.
- Maintain and develop effective links with other areas of the University, Edinburgh University Students' Association and external organisations in order to facilitate effective referral and coherent delivery of student support.
- Ensure that all staff delivering the service are appropriately qualified, trained and supported in their roles.
- Seek regular feedback from users, and make clear who students must contact with a complaint, compliment or suggestion.
- Monitor, review and seek to enhance their performance regularly, taking on board and acting upon feedback from students and Colleges and other relevant sources.

Services are expected to participate in appropriate quality assurance and enhancement processes within the University and/or within their professional arena.

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## Appendix – Personal Tutor (PT) System Roles and Responsibilities

The roles are set out in terms of the Core Purpose (which will be carried out by everyone in this role) and Main Responsibilities (with flexibility to accommodate local contexts and/or pedagogical requirements).

Personal Tutor  
Student Support Team  
Student as a Tutee  
Senior Tutor (School)  
Dean of Students (College)  
Assistant Principal Academic Support

### Personal Tutor (PT)

#### Core Purpose

- assist students in regularly reviewing their academic progress and performance ;
- encourage students to reflect on their learning, both within and beyond the formal curriculum, and how it contributes to their future development and career;
- help students to feel part of a community of learners;
- to provide pastoral support for their tutees consistent with the limits in section 4 and referring students to other staff in the School and support services as appropriate.

#### Main Responsibilities

- welcoming tutees;
- guiding tutees in course choice, confirming course choice and where appropriate enrolling students on courses;
- advising and supporting tutees in their studies including, for example, special circumstances, disciplinary or appeal matters;
- following the progress of tutees;
- to liaise with Student Support Teams and Teaching Organisations;
- to meet with tutees as specified in the School Personal Tutoring Statement;
- to respond promptly to a request for contact or support from a tutee and to provide an alternative point of contact when unavailable;
- to contribute to the appropriate keeping of records;
- to provide references for tutees;
- to undertake training and continuing professional development for the PT role.

### Student Support Team (Student Support Officer or equivalent)

#### Core Purpose

- to provide a point of contact for students;
- to maintain appropriate records and ensure that these are made available to staff;
- to provide administrative student support.



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## **Main Responsibilities:**

- to assist with and record the allocation of students to PTs;
- to provide information to staff and students;
- to ensure the PT and/or Teaching Organisation is made aware of any student who may be in need of support;
- sharing with other staff in Schools the process of providing pastoral support for students and referring students to support services as appropriate.

## **Student as a Tutee**

### **Core Purpose**

- to reflect on their academic progress;
- to record their reflections on how their learning contributes to their longer-term aspirations;
- to engage as a member of a community of learners.

### **Main responsibilities**

- to attend and participate actively in meetings with their Personal Tutor (this is a University requirement and attendance will be recorded);
- to inform their Personal Tutor and/or Student Support Team promptly of any relevant change in their circumstances and of any problems affecting their studies to enable effective support to be offered;
- to keep a record of activities and reflections on their progress, performance and longer-term aspirations associated with these activities;
- to take due account of advice or information given.

## **Senior Tutor**

### **Core Purpose**

- to have strategic overview of student support, including personal tutoring arrangements within the School;
- to lead the escalation of complex student cases which may require a case management approach, working with School Professional Services, College and specialist teams, depending on local arrangements, including but not limited to:
  - School / Deanery Student Support teams, Teaching Office / Graduate School Managers, local wellbeing roles (where such roles exist)
  - College Deans of Students, College Heads of Academic Administration
  - Colleagues in Student Experience Services, in particular Student Wellbeing
- to ensure that new PTs are well-briefed about the role, covering both academic and pastoral matters, and complete the required training;
- to help all PTs in the School to keep up-to-date with developments in provision;
- to advise PTs regarding unusual or complex issues;
- to liaise where needed between Student Support colleagues, PTs and the Dean of Students;
- to ensure that the effectiveness of student support and personal tutoring within the School is regularly and systematically monitored.

## **Main Responsibilities:**



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- to report directly to the Head of School or Director of Teaching (as appropriate locally)
- to lead the escalation of complex student cases involving students whose support needs are causing concern:
  - working with senior student support colleagues in Professional Services
    - e.g. for interruptions of study, support for study, and complex wellbeing issues
- to contribute as required to local case management committees handling ongoing complex cases
- to advise PTs, Student Support Teams and the Teaching Organisation when they are seeking advice on local student-support issues;
- to deal promptly and effectively with concerns raised by PTs and tutees;
- to seek regular interactions with student representatives in partnership with the Director of Teaching and Professional Services colleagues (as above), as appropriate
- to contribute to leadership and best practice activities, discussions, feedback events and network meetings at College / University level, as appropriate
- to engage in strategic discussions about student support structures and processes at School / Deanery level and in wider College or University fora and networks, as necessary;
- to assist the Head of School in interpreting student feedback in order to guide enhancement of the PT and student support system and inform annual review and management processes for individual PTs.
- to contribute to the School's annual and periodic quality assurance and enhancement processes.

## Essential:

- Thorough understanding of all codes and regulations relating to UG and PGT students
- Strong communication skills
  - with the ability to demonstrate empathy and compassion whilst maintaining boundaries and following due process
- High degree of familiarity with the various academic, professional and wellbeing support services on offer in the School / Deanery and across the University
- Has undertaken or will commit to undertaking core Mental Health and Wellbeing training provided by the University's Student Wellbeing Service
- Evidence of ability to work effectively as part of a multi-functional team of colleagues.

## Dean of Students

### Core Purpose

- to oversee student support in the College, working with Schools to ensure that there is an appropriate Personal Tutor system in place and working well;
- to liaise with student support services;
- to assist Senior Tutors, Heads of School and Head of College in interpreting student feedback to guide enhancement of the PT system;

### Main Responsibilities:

- to report directly to the Head of College;
- to liaise with other Deans in the College, with the Deans of Students in the other Colleges and with relevant Vice-Principals and Assistant Principals;
- to ensure that adequate and appropriate training and professional development is undertaken by PTs and STs;

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- to collaborate with support services and Schools regarding the design and delivery of PT/ST-related training and professional development;
- to coordinate, meet and advise STs and others in key support roles;
- to foster regular interchanges between STs and student representatives.

## Assistant Principal Academic Support

### Core Purpose

- To provide leadership for the Personal Tutor system;
- To improve direct, subject-specific, support for students from teaching academics.

### Main Responsibilities

- To develop metrics that assess the quality of student support at School and individual-academic staff member level, with a view to the full inclusion of student support issues in management, workload model and reward/performance processes;
- To work with colleagues in Human Resources and the Vice Principal for People and Culture to embed academic support in relevant policies and processes;
- To communicate and promote the importance of academic support for students to the University community.