

## Guiding Principles for Personal Tutors and Student Support staff

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## Background

These guiding principles are not intended to be a prescriptive set of rules. They aim simply to augment and adapt existing advice about how, when and for what purpose to meet with your taught students, in the context of hybrid learning and physical distancing.

*The shape and form of the existing Student Support and Personal Tutor structures have not changed. The recommendations following the 2019 Review of Student Support and Personal Tutoring are currently on hold due to the impact of the global pandemic, awaiting University Executive approval in the coming academic year.*

However, academic year 2020-21 will not be 'business as usual' due to the shift to hybrid learning and teaching for those programmes which had previously been on-campus taught programmes. These Guiding Principles constitute a temporary addendum to the existing [Academic and Pastoral Support Policy](#) and are designed to support schools in setting up and running student support despite the extraordinary challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic for academic year 20/21. For programmes which have always been and continue to be delivered Online, these Guiding Principles may be less relevant, albeit it is acknowledged that the nature and frequency of support required by our existing Online students may differ this year due to the impact the pandemic might have had on their studies.

Whilst these principles are not intended to be prescriptive, In the interests of continuity and to reassure our students, the prescribed set of PT/tutee meetings and timings described in the [Academic and Pastoral Support policy](#) remains in place.

However it should be noted that students in AY20/21 are likely if anything to need more support and guidance as they engage in their hybrid education, and students who are having difficulties may well need **more frequent** contact with their PTs and / or student support contacts than is set out in the Policy.

Schools and Deaneries are not required to update their PT Statement.

## Basic principles

As an outcome of their interactions and relationships with you, students should:

- have the opportunity to discuss their academic development and plans at appropriate and timely intervals
- know who they can approach in their School for any discussion of pastoral issues
- be contacted proactively, and for earlier-years students, more frequently, and not only in times of need or concern
- be welcomed into the [academic community in groups and individually](#)
- be registered on appropriate courses that allow them to progress and develop academically in the right time frame
- be signposted to the relevant specialist services (e.g. Student Counselling, Student Disability and Chaplaincy services, Careers and Employability, Institute for Academic Development, the Advice Place) when necessary
- have **on campus, face-to-face meetings with staff**, where it is safe to do so. [Appendix A](#) sets out the current health and safety information about how the University is preparing our Estate for a safe return to on campus work. Where it is not deemed safe to meet students in

person, we should use digital meeting tools (see [Meetings, Communications and Technology](#)).

### First meeting of the year

Regular and timely meetings are important for the PT-student relationship and we recognise the value of in-person, on-campus meetings, particularly to help establish new relationships as part of wider orientation and induction activities. These meetings are of particular importance and impact for new entrants to the University, both UG and PGT.

However, in-person, on-campus meetings should only be offered where it is safe to do so (see [Appendix A - Health and safety information on returning to the campus](#)), with particular attention to suitability and availability of meeting spaces, circulation and queuing spaces, and students and staff who might be at higher risk from the Covid-19. We also recognise that in many parts of the University's Estate, it will not be feasible to host large numbers of meetings over short periods of time (due to queue management, circulation and hygiene protocols) and it is therefore likely that in these areas of the University, in-person on-campus meetings might need to take place over a longer period of time (and therefore start of Semester administrative / transactional activities will need to be undertaken digitally).

During the first month of Semester, please make proactive contact with all of your tutees, and in particular those who might need more support (e.g. care-experienced students and students we know are either in quarantine or self-isolating as a result of the pandemic). Please refer to section entitled '[Awareness of particular cohorts or student profiles](#)' below. Please also ensure that you communicate clearly with your students about what the nature and timings of their meetings with you and colleagues in your School / Deanery is likely to be. Email templates are being developed and will be shared via the [Toolkits site](#) in advance of Semester 1.

The situation will be reviewed in late September/early October to ascertain the viability and safety of increasing the number of in-person on-campus meetings with students.

### Clarity of communications with students about whom to contact and how

Schools and Deaneries should make it clear whom the student should contact for what kind of support, which might typically be:

- The Personal Tutor for discussions relating to academic choices, development, and progression, and issues which might have a direct bearing on these. Depending on your School/Deanery or Programme, this might also be for initial pastoral support
- Student Support teams and roles (where these exist), including staff in Teaching Offices, for administrative, procedural and, potentially, pastoral and wellbeing issues
- Course Organisers and Lecturers with questions relating to specific courses and their hybrid delivery
- Specialist professional services teams across the University (including Student Disability and Student Counselling Services and Careers and Employability Service) which the student can and should access proactively, with or without a school referral.

We must ensure that Joint Programme students are not redirected on multiple occasions and/or receiving conflicting advice. This causes dissatisfaction, uncertainty and, potentially, academic misdirection. Ideally, every Undergraduate student on a Joint Programme or Combined Degree

should have access to a key contact in their 'home' school. The key contact will have clear understanding of the Joint / Combined Programme and its challenges and context.

*It is more than ever important that the tone and style of communications are friendly and supportive. Please endeavour to avoid communication styles which might put students off contacting staff about their concerns. Where appropriate, please encourage students to seek advice and support.*

## Setting expectations

Students' anxieties regarding assessments and examination marks, their implications, individual performance and preparedness for subsequent years of study, amongst other issues, may have been heightened by the impact of the pandemic and our shift to hybrid learning. It is important to help students arrive at reasonable expectations of themselves, their educators and those who provide support.

In your capacity as a Personal Tutor, you should:

- provide students with academic guidance and help them to reflect on their progress in order to get the most out of their studies.

All staff in Schools / Deaneries who are in student support roles (including but not limited to Personal Tutors and Student Support Officers or equivalent) should:

- provide students with relevant signposting and information about the university's wider network of specialist support, guidance and advisory services
- acknowledge the limits to which privacy and confidentiality can be offered. It is not always possible or appropriate to maintain confidentiality, for example if a student makes a disclosure which indicates they or somebody else might be in danger / at risk of harm in which you must consider sharing this information. (For more information, please refer to the [Charlie Waller Memorial Trust e-learning](#))
- ensure you set appropriate time limits and have an appropriate environment, on campus or remote, for your discussions
- be clear on the best way to contact you (e.g. by email or over Teams), if you are in a position to host 'office hours' and if so, what these are, and the typical time in which you are likely to respond. *We suggest including this information in your email signature*
- set expectations on what is not appropriate or reasonable (e.g. expecting / demanding responses in the evening or weekend) and [maintain appropriate boundaries](#).

## Meetings, Communications and Technology

Clarity of communications is more important than ever in a hybrid learning and support environment. We have adapted rapidly to using more and more varied digital communication tools. As highlighted above, now more than ever it is important to be friendly, approachable and supportive in all communications and ensure students know they can approach you for support if needed.

Please consider the nature of the discussion or meeting you are having, and the need for appropriate levels of privacy, when choosing the tool by which you communicate with your students. ISG has also developed a helpful tool for helping you to decide which technology may be

best suited: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/computing/comms-and-collab/online-meetings-and-events/which-tool-to-use>

Examples of the kinds of tools supported by the University are included in this link from ISG: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/computing/comms-and-collab/online-meetings-and-events/supported-tools>. Within your College, School or Deanery, there may be further guidelines.

Where it is deemed safe and appropriate to meet in-person with your students, consider what the best venue for your meeting might be.

If you need access to your computer and / or need to have a more private discussion, meeting in a University office space may be most suitable, provided you can be comfortable that physical distancing (as per current Scottish Government guidance) can be maintained, and that the set-up is consistent with the health and safety guidance provided in [Appendix A](#). If your discussion does not need to be private, you might consider meeting in a larger space rather than a private office, where you will still have access to EduRoam should you need systems access via a laptop or portable device.

Some colleagues and students might favour meeting outdoors for a 'walking meeting', or in an appropriate outdoor space (such as the outdoor social facilities that are expected to be set up in Bristo Square, KB and other campuses by the start of semester one) - especially if you are less likely to need to access systems during your discussion. In keeping with the [Five Ways to Wellbeing](#), this has several benefits including keeping active and enjoying the outdoors. It might also provide you and your students with a welcome change of scenery.

Other students and staff enjoy the convenience of online meetings as they do not need to travel between meetings or to and from campus, and this will be especially relevant for those students who have not been able to arrive in Edinburgh due to ongoing travel restrictions, concerns and quarantine periods. Many students have responded well to the switch to virtual interactions with staff and whilst some students may prefer the opportunity to meet in person on campus, others will continue to have valid reasons (convenience, anxiety about transmission of covid19, reluctance to travel) for preferring online meetings.

Please do not invite students into your home or private space for a meeting.

### Key dates and record keeping

- Students will now be required to re-register annually and update contact details, including emergency contacts etc. here: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-systems/support-guidance/students/matriculation/online-registration>
- Additional fields in the EUCLID Student Record and enhanced reporting tools are being developed in order to provide Schools / Deaneries with better information about the location of our students (in Edinburgh or studying remotely) and how they are engaging in their studies
- Student Systems are currently finalising the Key Dates for 2020-21. These will include deadlines for registering students on a course, assessment / examination periods, deadlines for publishing results and graduations. Key dates will be available here as soon as possible: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-systems/key-dates>.

## Supporting student development

Many colleagues use coaching and mentoring tools and conversations to aid their discussions with students, and these can work well whether face to face or online. These kinds of techniques can:

- empower students to take greater accountability and ownership for their success
- help students to identify their strengths and develop their skills
- shift a conversation from problems to potential solutions.

If your School/Deanery uses the "[Making Transitions Personal](#)" questionnaire, please note that a section has been added to reflect the impacts of the global pandemic, and we encourage you to review the results (for your individual students or on aggregate) to inform the nature of your conversations and meetings.

*We are developing a toolkit on supporting student reflection and solutions-focused techniques which will be added to the [toolkits site](#) as soon as possible. You can also look at the [coaching toolkit from HR](#) on the University's Learning and Development site.*

## Awareness of particular cohorts or student profiles

Students from particular backgrounds or with particular characteristics may have a unique set of concerns about hybrid learning/support and the impact of the pandemic (including but not limited to mature students, students with caring responsibilities, students from widening participation backgrounds, students of colour, LGBTQ+ students).

*We have tried to anticipate these in a further set of toolkits (currently in development) that will offer some thoughts on responses and signposts and will be shared on the [toolkits site](#) as soon as possible.*

- Based on work undertaken in 2019 by the Widening Participation team, we ask that Schools / Deaneries pay particular attention to the matching of Personal Tutors to students from care-experienced backgrounds when allocating students to PTs. Further information will be shared by the Widening Participation team on how to use BI Reports from the Student Record in order to do this.

In AY2020-2021, (and potentially beyond), we also need to be mindful that some students may be self-isolating or in travel-related quarantine at various points during the year and may require further support from you at this point. For this reason, we encourage you to make regular proactive contact with your students, to ensure students are aware of the support available and that they need not feel isolated from the university community whilst they are in physical isolation or quarantine.

## Looking after yourself

It is always important to keep relationships and meetings with students as friendly, as constructive and as safe as possible for everyone involved. This includes setting [and maintaining appropriate boundaries](#). It also requires personal disciplines that maximise empathy and minimise over-involvement in students' problems and their solutions, which risks creating dependencies. Nonetheless you may need to have uncomfortable or distressing conversations with a student, and it is very important that you are able to debrief or switch off after this sort of conversation:

- Debrief - think about who you speak to after such a conversation – in the first instance your manager, a colleague, or [the Listening Service](#)

- Switch off - try to schedule breaks between student meetings so you can process your thoughts, step away from your workspace, or simply have a glass of water.

### Monitoring and Improvement

All Schools and Deaneries must define a mechanism that ensures that the advice and assistance that students receive from their support teams and Personal Tutors is of high quality and responsive.

*The results, in the form of feedback and reflections on the support provided, should be included in the School's Annual Quality Report.*

The mechanism for monitoring and improvement must be made public and made clear to both students and the Assistant Principal for Quality Assurance.

## Appendices

### Appendix A - Health and safety information on returning to the campus

- The University has arrangements to ensure measures are in place to control and reduce the risk of transmission of the Covid 19 virus on campus. These measures are in line with Scottish Government sectoral guidance for universities, Public Health Scotland and the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) advice.
- University staff are working very hard to implement these new ways of working to have a safe return to campus for all. Working in partnership with the Trade Unions, all the Trade Union Health and Safety representatives are involved in reviewing the return to campus arrangements with the Colleges and review matters weekly before the operational plan and return to campus is approved for each building.
- All staff in the University will receive an induction to these control measures and new ways of working before coming back onto campus. These are being provided by the local building review teams that have been set up by the six College and Professional Services co-ordinating groups, overseeing the safe return to campus buildings.
- The staff inductions are initially being delivered remotely and have been supported to ensure a consistent message in all cases covering the following:
  - physical distancing requirements (currently at 2m),
  - signage and one way systems,
  - the enhanced cleaning of buildings and the additional visible touchpoint cleaning throughout the day by Estates' cleaning teams,
  - the review of building ventilation,
  - the reduction of occupancy of the buildings and how that will be managed and
  - building safety arrangements such as first aid and fire safety.
- A key message that staff and students receive is about staying at home should they be symptomatic and hand and respiratory hygiene. Staff are encouraged to wash hands frequently throughout the day and hand sanitiser stations will also be available within buildings. There is information available on the University Covid 19 website on face coverings for staff and students; the advice in line and as explained by current Scottish Government guidance is that people are expected to wear face coverings in University buildings unless they have good reasons not to.
- Staff concerned about their own health and returning to the campus should follow the advice provided on the Covid 19 FAQ page on the University's website. This explains how staff will be supported by their manager and university services. Also, following Scottish Government advice, how they can undertake an individual health and Covid 19 risk factor assessment to facilitate a discussion, if needed, with their GP and line manager. The same advice has been provided for students to support them.
- The building review groups are ensuring, where work activities are returning to the campus in line with the Scottish Government's route map and the University's plan, that risk assessment for work activities are reviewed. These assessments may identify additional measures required to reduce risk and these are then put in place. This includes reception

roles, customer and student facing roles and work within offices. These assessments will identify measures for university services and also for individuals to put in place for their own work activity. Work as a personal tutor conducted in an internal or external campus space will be included in this assessment for staff.

- If staff have any questions they can go to the Covid 19 website, where there is an FAQ section on return to work, their local school safety adviser who is involved in the building review groups, their line manager and they can also email [covid19@ed.ac.uk](mailto:covid19@ed.ac.uk) on any matter.