

Academic Personal Tutoring Policy



Summary			
The policy ensures a consistent approach to undergraduate and taught postgraduate student support across the University. The policy covers the role of the academic Personal Tutor, the Senior Tutor and the student, and provides general guidelines on how academic personal tutoring should be organised in schools.			
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UG and PGT students			
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1. **Introduction**
2. **The Personal Tutor**
General principles for personal tutoring
Responsibilities of the Personal Tutor
3. **The Senior Tutor**
General principles
Responsibilities of the Senior Tutor
4. **The student**
5. **Organisation of personal tutoring in schools**
Allocation of tutees to Personal Tutors
Type and frequency of meetings
Record keeping and attendance monitoring
Supporting students on joint honours or intercalated programmes
Supporting students studying away from Bristol
Supporting part time students
Supporting distance learners
Confidentiality
Training and support for Personal Tutors
Evaluation and quality assurance of the personal tutor system

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Academic personal tutoring is key to the academic and personal development of our taught students. The policy outlined here covers the role of the academic Personal Tutor¹ (hereafter, simply “the Personal Tutor”), the Senior Tutor and the student, and provides general guidelines on how academic personal tutoring should be organised in schools².
- 1.2 While it is recognised that there may be some local differences in the way in which personal tutoring operates in different schools, this policy has been developed to ensure a consistent approach to undergraduate and taught postgraduate student support across the University of Bristol. The details of how personal tutoring operates in schools should be clear and transparent and be communicated to both students and staff in the school.
- 1.3 The responsibility for reviewing and updating this policy on a regular basis lies with University Education Committee, which may delegate operational responsibility to another body or bodies.

2. The Personal Tutor

General principles for personal tutoring

- 2.1 The University aims to provide consistently excellent academic support for all taught students through the personal tutor system.
- 2.2 All undergraduate and taught postgraduate students are allocated a Personal Tutor by their home school at the start of their programme. In schools with exceptionally large postgraduate taught student

¹ In the non-modular professional programmes (BDS, BVSc and MBChB) titles other than “academic Personal Tutor” and “Senior Tutor” may be used but the responsibilities of the roles remain the same.

² The use of the word “school” within this document refers to schools, departments or individual programmes as appropriate.

cohorts where a panel or team of personal tutors is used, students must be made aware of the names and contact details for all panel members.

- 2.3. The Personal Tutor provides academic and personal development advice throughout the student's time on their programme of study.
- 2.4. The personal tutoring system must be sensitive to the needs of particular cohorts and individuals within those cohorts. It should reflect, for example, that the support needs of undergraduate and postgraduate taught students may differ, and that students on professional programmes may benefit from professional mentoring.
- 2.5. The role of Personal Tutor is considered a core responsibility for all academic members of University of Bristol staff on pathways 1 and 3. The role may also be undertaken by members of staff on pathway 2 or by English for Academic Purposes tutors, where the individual is appropriately qualified. NHS staff with honorary University contracts may also undertake the role if the individual is appropriately qualified.
- 2.6. Personal tutoring and the role of Senior Tutor should be reflected in the school's workload model, taking into account the number of tutees and/or the timetabled hours and preparation time associated with tutoring.
- 2.7. Excellence in personal tutoring should be recognised and rewarded through teaching awards and the promotion procedures
- 2.8. Personal Tutors will be provided with training, information and resources, including the Personal Tutor Handbook, to ensure they are supported in their role. The University will provide a template version of the Personal Tutor Handbook; schools should add information to this template to produce a school version of the handbook which provides details on the local operation of the personal tutor system.
- 2.9. Students should be provided with clear information on the operation of the personal tutorial system in their school.

Responsibilities of the Personal Tutor

The Personal Tutor will:

- 2.10. Understand their duties and responsibilities as a Personal Tutor and familiarise themselves with the contents of their school's Personal Tutor Handbook.
- 2.11. Have a holistic view of their tutees' academic and personal development (for example through personal development planning) and monitor their progress.
- 2.12. Provide information about University processes, procedures and expectations and provide appropriate individual advice during the student's University life.
- 2.13. Help manage the student's transition to, within, and from the University.
- 2.14. Be able to provide academic feedback and development support to help students understand what is expected of them academically.
- 2.15. Signpost to other support providers, such as the Senior Tutor, wellbeing advisers and central support services (such as the Careers Service, Library Services, etc).
- 2.16. Provide information about their tutee's degree programme and give advice on study choices.
- 2.17. Promote Bristol Futures, the three Bristol Futures themes (Global Citizenship, Innovation and Enterprise and Sustainable Futures), and opportunities for multidisciplinary working and skills development through activities such as Bristol Futures online open courses and Professional and Community Engagement (PACE) activities brokered by the Careers Service and Bristol Students' Union.
- 2.18. Encourage and facilitate student engagement in personal development planning using the Bristol Skills Framework, including having an oversight of their academic development needs, career planning, and attainment goals.
- 2.19. Write personal and academic references for the student if requested. For postgraduate taught students, it may be more appropriate for the project supervisor to act as the referee.
- 2.20. Respect the confidentiality of discussions with their tutees as appropriate.

- 2.21. Foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students, including those with protected characteristics³ and from widening participation backgrounds.
- 2.22. Record attendance at tutorials and maintain accurate and secure records of any sensitive discussions with their tutees using appropriate systems.
- 2.23. Undertake any required training or continuing professional development associated with the role.

3. The Senior Tutor

General principles

- 3.1. Each school will have a dedicated Senior Tutor, although schools with high student numbers may have more than one Senior Tutor. In schools with large numbers of postgraduate taught students it may be appropriate to have a Senior Tutor responsible for undergraduate personal tutoring and another responsible for postgraduate taught personal tutoring.
- 3.2. The Senior Tutor will be a senior member of academic staff and they have a pivotal role in academic support. Senior Tutors need to be able to undertake what may be at times sensitive and difficult conversations and referrals. They are likely to be involved in the more serious and complex cases that may be out of the experience of most academic Personal Tutors. They will need detailed knowledge of the academic processes and regulations relating to the degree programmes in the school.
- 3.3. The Senior Tutor role should normally be appointed for a fixed term (three years is suggested), although the tenure can be extended with the agreement of the Head of School and the individual in post. Schools should put appropriate procedures in place to ensure succession planning and careful handover of the role. Some faculties may choose to recruit and appoint full time Senior Tutors if warranted by the workload.
- 3.4. The role of Senior Tutor is an important and substantive one and should be recognised in the individual's workload by a reduction of other duties commensurate with the size of the school.
- 3.5. Senior Tutors should work closely with Personal Tutors, wellbeing advisers and identified school, faculty and University professional services staff to lead the provision of positive student support within each school. While student support should be provided by Personal Tutors in the first instance, it is sometimes appropriate for the Senior Tutor to be involved as well.
- 3.6. Senior Tutors should not have any other role (such as chairing a progress committee or an examination board) that could represent a conflict of interest.

Responsibilities of the Senior Tutor

The duties of the Senior Tutor(s) within each school include:

- 3.7. Overseeing the overall provision of support for undergraduate and/or postgraduate taught students, including those studying away from the University, and the implementation of relevant University policies within the school.
- 3.8. Defining the frequency and form of contact points between Personal Tutors and their tutees, within the University guidelines given below.
- 3.9. Offering specific advice to students on matters of academic process such as appeals, progression, transfers, withdrawals and suspension of studies.
- 3.10. Offering additional pastoral support to students when needed.
- 3.11. Referring and signposting students to appropriate points of support outside the school.
- 3.12. Dealing with enquiries and complaints from students on the tutoring system and arranging an alternative Personal Tutor where appropriate.
- 3.13. Ensuring continuity of care when students are assigned a new Personal Tutor, or when they transfer into another school, by ensuring relevant information is passed on to the new tutor/school.

³ Protected characteristics are defined by the Equality Act 2010 as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage & civil partnership, pregnancy & maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

- 3.14. As part of Welcome Week, meeting new students and ensuring they are informed of the opportunities for support that are available to them.
- 3.15. Monitoring and having an overview of student progress and following up students who are absent without leave or perform poorly in examinations and other assessments.
- 3.16. Supporting and advising Personal Tutors on any complex issues raised by a tutee.
- 3.17. Reviewing and reporting upon the quality and operation of student support and engagement in the school, overseeing implementation of this policy and any strategic initiatives which affect the personal tutorial system, such as personal development planning.
- 3.18. Being an active member of the Senior Tutors' Network by acting as a conduit for information, disseminating good practice, and identifying training needs for Senior Tutors and Personal Tutors. This Network will also serve as the primary interface by which Senior Tutors are able to engage with the central student support services and Bristol Students' Union advice service ('Just Ask') and share good practice across schools.
- 3.19. Being a member of relevant school committees such as the student staff liaison committee and chairing the extenuating circumstances committee. To avoid conflicts of interest at exam boards, the Senior Tutor should not be programme director for the cohort he or she is responsible for.
- 3.20. Ensuring that any disability or inherent difficulty that is disclosed by a student via the extenuating circumstances or self-certification process is followed up, providing advice and sign-posting the student to support as necessary.
- 3.21. Being involved in the annual production on the Personal Tutor Handbook for their school based on the University template and providing induction for new Personal Tutors.

In addition, the Senior Tutor is also responsible for ensuring the following activities are completed, although they may be undertaken by another(s):

- 3.22. Allocation of tutees to Personal Tutors.
- 3.23. The arrangements for student support within the school are correctly described and appropriately signposted, such that all students are informed of the support opportunities that are available to them throughout their University life.
- 3.24. Student records for engagement and attendance and any extenuating circumstances or pastoral issues that have been raised are monitored, so the Senior Tutor can actively intervene where appropriate.
- 3.25. The arrangements for a member of professional services in the school to act as an alternative contact for students are appropriate and satisfactory in its operation.
- 3.26. The formulation of the school's Wellbeing Partnership Agreement and its communication to staff and students.
- 3.27. The needs of students who are disabled or have other ongoing needs are met, in liaison with the School Disability Coordinator.
- 3.28. Appropriate arrangements to support students with particular needs are implemented, such as new students, international students, mature students, students who are under 18, women in predominantly male schools and *vice versa*, and students from non-standard backgrounds.

4. The student

Students are active partners in the personal tutoring system, their responsibilities are:

- 4.1. To be familiar with the role of their Personal Tutor.
- 4.2. To attend and prepare for all personal tutorials and respond promptly to any communication from their Personal Tutor.
- 4.3. To reflect on their academic progress, to be aware of their skills development needs and to engage in personal development planning.
- 4.4. To notify their Personal Tutor if they are unable to attend a scheduled meeting for good reason, and to make arrangements for an alternative meeting if appropriate.

- 4.5. To familiarise themselves with the other support structures and services available at the University and to make effective use of them.
- 4.6. To actively participate in the personal tutorials and to consider the advice and feedback from their Personal Tutor.
- 4.7. To be proactive in seeking support from their Personal Tutor when required.
- 4.8. To inform the Personal Tutor or Senior Tutor promptly of any circumstances which are affecting their academic work.

5. Organisation of personal tutoring in schools

Allocation of tutees to Personal Tutors

- 5.1. The Senior Tutor is responsible for the allocation of tutees to Personal Tutors, although this activity may be undertaken in collaboration with other members of school staff.
- 5.2. The total number of tutees allocated to any given Tutor will be variable. However, the expectation is that full-time staff will normally have no more than 30 tutees at any one time. Where greater numbers of tutees are allocated to academic staff it is expected that the Tutor should have a reduced workload in other aspects of their role. (It is recognised that in schools with exceptionally large postgraduate taught cohorts, where a panel or team of Personal Tutors may be used, this recommended maximum number of tutees may be exceeded (see 5.5.)).
- 5.3. If a Personal Tutor is unable to continue their personal tutoring responsibilities, the Senior Tutor must identify an alternative Personal Tutor for the student and inform the student of the change.
- 5.4. If a student wishes to change their Personal Tutor, they should contact the Senior Tutor who will wherever possible arrange for them to transfer to another member of staff. The student does not have to present a reason for wanting to change their Tutor.
- 5.5. For postgraduate taught programmes there are three possible models of personal tutoring:
 - In small programmes (generally those programmes with 20 students or fewer) the role of Personal Tutor may be taken solely by the programme director.
 - In medium sized programmes (generally those with between 20 and 100 students) there may be a number of Personal Tutors, each of whom is allocated a group of students.
 - In large programmes or in schools with exceptionally large postgraduate taught cohorts (generally those with over 100 students), in the interests of expediency, a team or panel of Personal Tutors may be used to support all students. Where this model is used it is essential that students have access to a similar level of academic and personal support as is available to as students on smaller programmes. The nature of this model will mean that support will be generally more reactive than that available via other models.

Type and frequency of meetings

- 5.6. Personal Tutors are expected to contact their new tutees as early as possible, normally in Welcome Week or early in Week 1.
- 5.7. Personal tutorials can take place as small group or one-to-one meetings, as appropriate.
- 5.8. The schedule and format of tutorials is determined by the Senior Tutor to ensure a regular programme of contact.
- 5.9. Whenever possible, tutorials will be timetabled via syllabus plus to ensure they appear in both staff and student online timetables. (If programmes do not timetable any of their teaching using syllabus plus, tutorials should appear in the official published timetable which is made available to staff and students.)
- 5.10. It is expected that the frequency of tutorial meetings for full-time (standard attendance) **undergraduate students** is given below. At least one of these contact points each year should be a one-to-one session.
 - at least THREE contact points will be scheduled in each teaching block of the student's first year of study,
 - at least TWO contact points will be scheduled in each teaching block in the subsequent years of study,

5.11. It is expected that the frequency of tutorial meetings for full-time (standard attendance) **postgraduate taught students** is normally as follows (variations are only permitted in schools with exceptionally large PGT cohorts):

- THREE points of contact in the first teaching block and ONE in the second teaching block. Toward the end of the second teaching block the student's project supervisor would normally become the main source of support.

Record keeping and attendance monitoring

5.12. The Senior Tutor will ensure that the allocation of tutor groups is recorded on the student record system.

5.13. The school will put in place a suitable process for attendance monitoring that allows Personal Tutors to record attendance at tutorials. These systems may also be used for visa compliance purposes where appropriate.

5.14. The Senior Tutor will have oversight of attendance at tutorials and will follow up on any students who persistently fail to engage.

Supporting students on joint honours or intercalated programmes

5.15. For joint honours students, the 'lead' school is responsible for assigning a Personal Tutor. Within the joint school, a member of staff will be identified as a point of contact for matters relating to that school.

5.16. University of Bristol students who intercalate into Bristol programmes will retain the Personal Tutor allocated to them in their professional programme. Schools may choose to assign tutors to internal intercalating students if appropriate to the academic support required.

5.17. Students from outside the University of Bristol who intercalate into Bristol programmes should be assigned a Personal Tutor in the intercalation school.

Supporting students studying away from Bristol

5.18. The Senior Tutor, in liaison with other relevant individuals (e.g. study abroad academic director, the Global Opportunities Team etc), is responsible for ensuring the processes by which students are supported whilst they are studying away from Bristol, including but not limited to those undertaking

- study abroad
- placements
- work in clinical academies

5.19. The Senior Tutor should liaise with the member of academic staff who coordinates the placements to ensure regular contact with students studying away from Bristol is maintained. In addition, wherever possible, schools should have a designated contact for students within the placement institution and/or should visit the student at least once during the placement period.

5.20. Students should be contacted at least once a term by their Personal Tutor; contact should normally be via email, telephone and/or skype (or similar technology).

Supporting part time students

5.21. Senior Tutors should ensure that part-time students have arrangements which allow them to meet their Personal Tutors when the student is studying in Bristol. Personal Tutors should maintain periodic contact with part-time tutees even when they are away from the University; this may be via email, telephone and/or skype (or similar technology).

Supporting distance learners

5.22. Distance learners should be allocated a Personal Tutor and have access to timely and appropriate academic support. Instead of face-to-face meetings, contact may be via email, telephone and/or skype (or similar technology).

Confidentiality

- 5.23. Personal information about tutees is subject to the Data Protection Act and should be treated as confidential. More information of the Act can be found at www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/data-protection/
- 5.24. Tutors must gain a student's permission to pass on any personal information shared with them. Information must not be disclosed to any third party (including parents and guardians) without the student's express permission. Sensitive data may be disclosed in an emergency situation when it is in the vital interests of the student. Advice on this can be obtained from the Secretary's Office or, if out of hours, from Security Services.

Training and support for Personal Tutors

- 5.25. The University will provide generic training for new Personal Tutors through its CREATE programme.
- 5.26. Schools should induct and train all Personal Tutors to ensure they are familiar with the local personal tutoring procedures.
- 5.27. Additional *ad hoc* continuing professional development (CPD) may also be required from time to time and will be coordinated by the Senior Tutor.

Evaluation and quality assurance of the personal tutor system

- 5.28. The Senior Tutor will monitor and review the personal tutor system in his or her school taking into consideration student survey results (data and free text comments) and feedback from student reps, student staff liaison committees and staff.
- 5.29. The Senior Tutor will report any problems or concerns to the Head of School or School Education Director who will ensure that they are addressed via the school Education Action Plan (EAP).
- 5.30. The University Quality Team will monitor the personal tutor system through the EAP and through student feedback.
- 5.31. The University will recognise and reward academic staff who demonstrate exceptional performance in personal tutoring through teaching awards and/or through the promotion processes.