Personal Tutoring at Staffordshire University

Staff Guidelines
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Introduction

It is the policy of Staffordshire University that each faculty has a Personal Tutoring process. These guidelines are written to advise those taking on the role of Personal Tutor at Staffordshire University about the roles and responsibilities and best practice when undertaking this activity. The guidelines have been produced by a Personal Tutoring Working Group and have taken into account the findings of a review of current practice and research into the best practice from managers, personal tutors and students. In addition, recommendations from an external audit by Grant Thornton, of the policy and the practice at the University have been taken into consideration. The University recognises that there will be slightly differing roles within each of the disciplines but our aim is to ensure that we have an overarching framework to guide staff in this role. This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Personal Tutoring Policy (2014).

Personal Tutoring is an essential component of the student experience and it is the link between many of the policies and procedures and the services we offer to support our students. Staffordshire University puts the students at the heart of everything we do and excellence in practice in personal tutoring is key to its success in this aim.

Staff Development for Personal Tutors

Staffordshire University is committed to supporting staff who undertake the key role of personal tutor and staff development and training is essential in equipping staff with the knowledge and skills to carry out the role and responsibilities effectively. Continuous Professional Development will be available to staff to enhance their practice in this area. The training is likely to take a variety of formats, either face-to-face and/or the circulation of guidance material and/or update information. This also includes sharing best practice across the university.

The roles and responsibilities of the Personal Tutor

The role of the personal tutor is varied and complex and these guidelines will indicate the minimum standard of practice (see appendix 1) expected from Personal Tutors at Staffordshire University. However it is not intended to be an exhaustive list but rather indicate some of the ways
the Personal Tutor can support tutees. The Personal Tutoring Policy will ensure each of our students will be allocated a named academic contact within their School/Award Team who they can talk to about their personal development and any pastoral concerns. As the personal face of the University you, in the role of Personal Tutor, you can therefore be extremely influential in enhancing the quality of the students’ experience. Personal tutors have a key role in supporting students particularly during periods of transition (when new to the university or when commencing placement/ work experience or preparing for working life following graduation). The role is fundamental in identifying students in difficulty, and directing them to appropriate sources of help and guidance. It is not expected that personal tutors will be able to have all the answers to hand but that he/she will act as a conduit for referrals between our various services and support staff. Personal tutors need to be supportive, empathetic and to be able to direct the students to a range of student support services as appropriate. Personal tutors may need to discuss issues relating to the student’s progress, performance or attendance. It is essential that students who are absent for more than two consecutive lectures are followed up to check that all is well. However you are not expected to be a specialist advisor but rather to be aware of the services available and to signpost the students appropriately. It is an expectation that you will record and maintain records of all personal tutoring activities in accordance with the Personal Tutoring Policy. You will act as an advocate for the student when necessary and be able to provide the Assessment and Award Boards with additional information to support students’ progression.

**Frequency of meetings:**

All students should meet with his/her personal tutor during the induction to the programme and there should be a minimum of **THREE** tutorials throughout the academic year. This is intended to be a **minimum recommendation**; however, you may find it necessary to meet with your tutees more frequently than this in order to promote best practice and to meet specific needs. The first tutorial should take place in **induction week** or as soon as is possible afterwards. Meeting the student early in the programme establishes a good rapport and hopefully will enable the student to feel comfortable to ask for support rather than facing issues alone and without knowing who to turn to for help. Tutorials may take place as one to one sessions or as small group tutorials. Students who
wish to discuss a confidential issue should be granted a one to one tutorial.

Personal Tutors will be allocated by the Academic Group Lead for the award (course) and will be tutors of students within this academic group. Students will be allocated to a Personal Tutor prior to commencing the programme of study and this information will be available from the Student Information Systems (SITS). The student will be able to access this before starting their programme of study.

Record keeping and the Data Protection Act

Personal Tutors need to keep accurate records of all personal tutorials; these will be maintained electronically via SITS eventually but feel free to copy the form at the end of this document in the interim period. Students may sometimes reveal some sensitive information that they do not wish to share with other staff and therefore Personal Tutors should record that there are personal circumstances and what referrals have been suggested but not the detail of issues. It is important that where we do need to share this information with others that the student’s permission is granted and that this is shared with a minimum staff who need to know, there may be exceptional circumstances when information needs to be shared even though the student’s permission is not given, the student should be informed that you are doing so (see exceptions under Data Protection Act 1998). All Personal Tutor Records should be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988.
Pastoral care

It is essential that personal tutors establish a good relationship at the beginning of a programme so that assistance can be given when there are issues, these may include issues relating to loneliness and being homesick, issues around relationships with significant others, anxiety about a new life, health issues, financial issues, accommodation, diet, spiritual needs and previously undisclosed disability. It is essential that Personal Tutors are familiar with the support services we can offer to students so that Personal Tutors can discuss appropriate services and help in making referrals to these services.

There are **two main sources of help** that you can turn to if you need support to ensure the pastoral needs or your tutees are met, the Students’ Union or Student Guidance Advisors. Student Guidance Advisors are often a good first point of referral as they can support the students and make referrals to other services. Student Guidance Advisors have a wide range of knowledge about all of our support services at the university and a good knowledge of external agencies and can act as a link between the Personal Tutor and other services; information can be obtained on faculty advisors at:

**Student Guidance Advisors:**

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/support_depts/studentguidance/advisors/index.jsp

**Students’ Union:**

The Students’ Union can provide a whole host of assistance with a range of issues, it is advisable that you familiarise yourself with the officers and get to know what services are offered.

http://www.staffsunion.com/
Student’s Extenuating Circumstances:

When students are experiencing difficulties in their personal lives with issues or health problems, it may be that Personal Tutors will need to assist students with Extenuating Circumstances claims and so should familiarise themselves with the Extenuating Circumstances Regulations. Personal Tutors need to be familiar with the types of claims and the consequences of each type of claim. The regulations can be accessed at:

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/assets/extenuating_circumstances_procedure_tcm44-25749.pdf

Student will need to apply using the online system accessed via ‘My Portal’. There is more information on this in the student pages. Personal Tutors may be requested to provide a supporting statement for a student claiming Extenuating Circumstances.

Other pastoral services include:

Student Enabling Centre:

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/study/disabled/index.jsp The centre can offer assistance with disability issues, specific learning disabilities, e.g. dyslexia, counselling and mental wellbeing. Students can receive advice and an assessments of their needs. Personal tutors should be aware of tutees who have a Learning Support Agreement and check that needs are being met in accordance with the agreement.

Financial matters:

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/support_depts/info_centre/finance/index.jsp

Accommodation:

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/support_depts/accommodation/

Advice for Care leavers:

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/study/careleavers/

Spiritual needs or just someone to talk to:

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/support_depts/chaplaincy/index.jsp
International Student Support:

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/international/support/index.jsp

Students may occasionally raise issues that require immediate attention and that need to be addressed urgently - here is a useful resource to make a note of:

**For a range of urgent matters including out of hours help and advice:**

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/assets/Guidelines%20for%20Supporting%20Students%20in%20Distress_tcm44-43332.pdf

### Academic Development of Tutees

The Personal Tutor should monitor the tutee’s academic progress throughout the year and be able to signpost a student who is struggling academically to access services and support that is required to enhance the independent learning skills required for higher education. Best practice includes monitoring of progress and grades at least twice in each year. Personal Tutors should familiarise themselves with resources for study skills and you should include discussion on poor academic practice and academic misconduct as part of the induction processes. The tutorial sessions occurring later on in the programme, following completion of some assessed work, should also aim to develop the student’s reflection on, and use of, feedback on assessments to enhance future grades.

Students who are struggling with academic skills should be referred to the Academic Skills Tutors who will be able to offer more extensive advice and guidance with all aspects of understanding assessment and feedback and practice with academic skills.

All students should be directed to resources such as the Assignment Survival Kit (ASK), Pebblepad e-portfolio, and other resources. These are available on the link below and students can access appointments for meeting Academic Skills Tutors on the same link:

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/support_depts/infoservices/learning_support/academic_skills/study_skills/resources.jsp
Professional Development of the Tutee

Personal tutors should aim to assess the progress of the students towards achieving the Staffordshire Graduate attributes through the Personal Development Planning, this may include assistance with curriculum vitae, referring to career advice and advising about other development opportunities. A Personal Tutor may be asked to give references for their tutees. Students should be made aware of the Careers Centre, staff working in the centre can offer advice on writing a Curriculum Vitae, or on making applications to Unitemps or apply for an extensive range of volunteering opportunities to enhance his/her CV. Click on the link to access this information:

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/support_depts/careers/

Social Development

Personal tutorials may be used to help students to settle in and adapt to university life, to make new friends and to understand the culture of the institution and the local area and in addition, to help overseas students to understand cultural and social norms of the area. Initial tutorials in Welcome Week may be arranged as small group tutorials and include icebreaking activities to facilitate this work. Personal tutors should be aware of the range of activities and clubs available to students through the Students’ Union and the International Student Office for overseas students.

http://www.staffsunion.com/welcome/2014/

Identifying ‘at risk’ students

One of the most valuable aspects of the role is to identify those students who are ‘at risk’ of under achieving. Students, who have poor attendance, or he/she is using the Extenuating Circumstances regularly, or who have low grades, or grades that decrease rapidly, or that exhibit changes in behaviour, may need additional help and support. This may also include any concerns or issues arising in placements or on work experience. The
sooner that any issues are identified the better as research demonstrates that early interventions can help students to succeed.

There may be a range of reasons why the student’s behaviour or grades change but we if we can detect this early on we may be able to provide services and support to assist the students with overcoming any difficulties. Personal Tutors should also be aware that often students from BME groups underachieve at university despite arriving with excellent level three qualifications. Whatever the reasons for the student being at risk an early referral to appropriate support services may help to increase our success rates and the university’s reputation as well as ensuring that our students achieve the best outcome that they can.

Personal Tutors may have to manage tutorials due to issues which concern the student's behaviour and attitudes, or indeed concerns about health issues these can be difficult situation to manage but the university does have clear guidance about the procedure to follow in such circumstances.

Student behaviour and Fitness to study

Information on this can be found via the following link:

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/assets/Student%20Behaviour%20and%20Fitness%20to%20Study%20Policy_tcm44-78563.pdf

Supporting Students with disabilities

The Personal Tutor should be aware if his/her tutee has any disabilities and should be familiar with the content of any Learning Support Agreement. The tutee will have a copy of his/her agreement and you can check that this meets the needs of the tutee. The Personal Tutor should ascertain that adjustments are being made in accordance with the agreement and record that the discussion has taken place and should raise any issues of non-compliance with the Academic Group Lead. If a personal tutee discloses a disability, the Personal Tutor should make appropriate referrals to Student Enabling Centre if the student wishes to receive help and he or she may be assessed for a Learning Support Agreement. These actions should be recorded in the notes from the personal tutorial.
Student Enabling Centre:
http://www.staffs.ac.uk/study/disabled/support/

Student enabling will discuss the Learning Support Agreement with students before sending this out to the faculties. It may also useful to access the faculty Equality and Diversity Officer if adjustments are not being met or you require further advice or assistance. Personal tutors may need to complete a Personal Evacuation Emergency Plan (PEEP) for tutees with mobility problems. Assistance from the Faculty Equality and Diversity officers can be sought to help with this assessment.

Students who have a disability that is uncommon and the Personal Tutor may not understand the students’ needs fully may need to ask the tutee about what help is required and how we can make reasonable adjustments, try to remember that anyone with a disability will be an expert in their own condition and needs- talk to the tutee!

More information on advice for students and financial help is available from:
http://www.staffs.ac.uk/support_depts/equality/issues/disability/index.jsp#student contacts

Placement Support

If the award includes a placement, the student’s practice within this setting may also highlight issues which need to be dealt with efficiently in order to promote the student’s experience and his/her achievement. In these instances there should be collaboration between the placement provider, the student's placement supervisor and university staff to ensure that the student is supported and is able to achieve goals/competencies required to meet all the learning outcomes and any relevant professional competencies. Effective early liaison should be encouraged and the appropriate faculty representatives involved accordingly. There should be clear written guidance with regard to all placements in relation to:

- The role of the university
- The university’s expectations of students in placement
- The role of the placement and their expectations of our students
Professional Regulatory Statutory Body requirements including Codes of Conduct

The personal tutor may need to liaise with professionals involved, and support the tutee when there are difficulties arising in placement for any reason. Where these concern health issues relating to the student or behaviour and attitudes you should read the policy relating to Behaviour and Fitness to Study:

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/assets/Student%20Behaviour%20and%20Fitness%20to%20Study%20Policy_tcm44-78563.pdf

Communicating Information

Personal tutorials offer an excellent opportunity to engage with students and to ensure the student has an opportunity to discuss the award programme and to give positive feedback about his/her experience and suggest where improvement could be made and to discuss any issues relating to the University which we can use to enhance the quality of programmes. Personal Tutors need to be a conduit of information so that students can be directed to appropriate support services or learn about activities and opportunities available at the university. It is expected that all personal Tutors will undertake some staff development activity on the types of services and how these may be accessed but there is no expectation that Personal Tutors will hold expert knowledge in these areas but rather be able to signpost the student to the appropriate member of staff with the knowledge and expertise. Personal Tutorials may be used to communicate improvements made by the University to enhance the quality of provision following surveys etc.

It is best practice to record at least one achievement on the Personal Tutoring Record alongside any actions – this will encourage the student to succeed.

Award and Assessment Boards

Personal Tutors will be able to advocate for students at Assessment and Award Board and discuss the overall progress of the student and ensure these boards are aware of evidence of mitigating circumstances from personal tutoring records. The Personal Tutor should be available
following the publication of results from Award Boards to provide information, advice and guidance to tutees and to refer the student to appropriate support systems where necessary.

Conflicts of Interest

The Personal Tutor should, whenever possible, avoid situations where there is a conflict of interest, for example, the Personal Tutor should not act to investigate instances of issues where there is either a Fitness to Practice Investigation (in applicable awards) or Academic Misconduct.

Managing Students’ Expectation and Work Load

It is essential that all students are afforded a similar experience of the Personal Tutoring Process. Whilst there is recognition of the restraints on the management of work load there are some minimum requirements for the Personal Tutor, that:

- Students are aware of the contact details for the Personal Tutor
- Students are aware of the times when the Personal Tutor is available and knows how to arrange a tutorial
- ‘As a minimum, students should expect an acknowledgment of an e-mail enquiry to their personal tutor within 3 working days, with a more substantive response within 7 working days.’
- ‘All staff are required to publish an ‘out of office’ message if they expect to be away for more than 2 working days. This message should indicate when the member of staff will be back and who can be contacted in the meantime.’ (Personal Tutoring Policy, 2014)
- Students know who to contact in an urgent situation
- Students should receive a similar experience from all tutors so a collaborative agenda with clear aims is recommended and a similar time allocated for each tutee

- It is recognised that students with complex issues may need to spend longer in a tutorial or have more frequent tutorials this should be taken into consideration when planning tutorial timetables
- Students are partners in Personal Tutoring and should come to the tutorial prepared and bringing along any documents/information/feedback that is to be discussed
• Any goals set for future tutorials should be SMART-i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time specified for completion

Confidentiality and data protection

All staff should adhere to the confidentiality policy and should not discuss sensitive issues disclosed by a student unless permission if given to do so or when permitted within the law, such as incidents of threats of self-harm (see Personal Tutoring Policy, 2014). Records of personal tutorials should be stored securely in line with the Data Protection Act and using only the University’s agreed systems.
Appendix 1

Minimum standards

(These are taken from the revised Personal Tutoring Policy)

Whilst acknowledging that there may be differences in the way personal tutoring is organised in various subject areas, the University is committed to setting minimum standards. Aligned to the above role requirements, the following minimum standards are expected:

a) Allocation: Students should be given the name of their Personal Tutor either before or during induction week. All personal tutors will be academic members of staff.

b) First contact: The initial meeting/contact between a student and their personal tutor should normally be within the first two weeks of the course.

c) Referral to others: During the first meeting/contact between a student and their personal tutor, information should be made available about how to access other sources of student advice and guidance within the University. This information should also be documented within the award handbook.

d) Frequency of meetings/contact: Whilst the frequency of contact may vary between subject areas and across levels, as a minimum, each student can expect to be offered the opportunity to engage with three tutorial sessions a year (normally one during induction and then one in each semester). These may be one-to-one meetings, group tutorials or both.

e) Contact arrangements: During the first meeting/contact, students must be informed about how they can contact their tutor quickly if necessary. Staff and students should set clear boundaries and expectations about a mutually preferred method of communication. As a minimum, students should expect an acknowledgment of an e-mail enquiry to their personal tutor within 3 working days, with a more substantive response within 7 working days. All staff are required to publish an ‘out of office’ message if they expect to be away for more than 2 working days. This message should indicate when the member of staff will be back and who can be contacted in the meantime.

f) Clarity re the role of the personal tutor: The system for personal tutoring and the role of the personal tutor should be explained during the first meeting/contact (i.e. for distance learning students). This information should also be documented.
in award handbooks and other appropriate publications made available to students.

g) **Content of tutorials:** Although this may vary between discipline areas and levels, it should be made explicit to students through specific statements written in handbooks. It is suggested that where this is relevant, a discussion around elements of each student’s engagement with the Staffordshire Graduate curriculum delivery should be a regular topic of discussion. Other topics of discussion could include:
   - Higher Education Achievement Record
   - Employability (including CV writing)
   - University regulations and procedures
   - Study skills, such as report-writing
   - Assessment and feedback
   - Engagement with student surveys

h) **Documentation/record-keeping:** For 1:1 tutorials, personal tutors should document the date and an overview of issues discussed and this should normally be recorded.

i) **Confidentiality:** Through the award handbook, students should receive a statement about the confidentiality of matters discussed between them and their personal tutor, with the proviso that matters which would need to be dealt with officially may need to be referred on and/or placed on record. All personal information held is subject to the Data Protection Act and the University policy on Data Protection and Information Security, giving students the right of access to their file. Whilst information given to a personal tutor will be treated as confidential, there are circumstances in which the University’s commitment to confidentiality can be overridden, for example, in exceptional circumstances a personal tutor may be asked to pass on information in the vital interests of a student (such as risk of harm to self or others) or when a disclosure may be required by law.

j) **Monitoring of student progress:** At least twice in each academic year, personal tutors should review the progress of each of their tutees across all their modules.

k) **Interpretation of feedback:** To assist their ongoing learning and academic development, all students should expect their personal tutor to be able to help them translate feedback from
assessments (albeit after the student has had an initial discussion with the module tutor).

I) **Staff training:** All personal tutors should receive refresher and update training in line with ongoing changes to the system. The training is likely to take a variety of formats, both face-to-face and the circulation of guidance material and/or update information. This should occur at least once during each academic year and be based on the (continually updated) Personal Tutoring Handbook.

m) **Continual improvement:** On an annual basis, all Faculties should put in place evaluation systems to ensure that the personal tutoring system is working effectively. This evaluation may take a number of different formats and may either stand alone or be integrated within other University processes such as module evaluations, student surveys and teaching observations. As an output of this evaluation, a written report should be produced and made available centrally through the Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTAC) committee.

n) **Management responsibility:** Within the University, there should be a named role-holder who has overall responsibility for the personal tutoring system. Similarly within Faculties, one person should have overall responsibility for the personal tutoring system. In addition, the LTAC committee should be the central conduit for the monitoring and evaluation of the personal tutoring system.
Appendix 2

Examples of practice (for use within staff development)

Student A

Student A makes an appointment to see her Personal Tutor, she is thinking of giving up on the award as she has some personal issues. She feels that she cannot cope any longer and wants to leave the course. Following a discussion the student discloses that her mother is ill and that she is about to have chemotherapy and so she is caring for some younger siblings, there is an assignment due and her mind cannot concentrate on this. It is all too much for her.

The Personal tutor expresses empathy with the student and looks at all of the options available; the Personal Tutor advises that the student applies for Extenuating Circumstances for this imminent assessment to relieve the immediate pressure. He advises the student on the process and what types of evidence the student will need to support the claim, he offers to write a supporting statement for the student to upload to the claim. He discusses how the student will cope with attendance at the university and what we can do to accommodate the student’s circumstances, an appointment is made with the Faculty’s Student Guidance Advisor. The Personal Tutor also discusses any spiritual needs and informs the student about the counselling service offered at the university.

The outcome is that some minor adjustments are made that help the student over this difficult period, the extenuating circumstance is upheld and the student has a further assessment opportunity, this ensures that a better grade is achieved and this in turn affects the degree classification. The student is able to talk about her problems with professionals and feels able to cope with the support in place the student successfully completes the degree.

Reflection: What are the key issues here?

What is the role of the tutor in this situation?
**Student B**

Student B is due to see his Personal Tutor (PT), the PT has asked the student to bring along information on his grades and an example of feedback. The student is reluctant to do this as the grades are not at all what he expected to achieve, he is de-motivated. He is very disappointed with his performance and is finding the degree much harder than he expected. The tutorial is open and honest and the issues around the grades are discussed, the student feels that he has poor academic skills but that he has grasped the course information very well, he just cannot express this in an academic format. This is evidenced in the feedback the student has received on his work. The tutor suggests that he meets the Academic Skills Tutor who can help with this, the PT also directs the student to the university’s resources including the Assignment Survival Kit, (ASK). They agree to meet again soon after the next assessment. The student is really pleased, he has received some help with his academic skills and felt able to speak to the module leader for clarification on this assignment brief, the grades are much better and his confidence is high, he is now really motivated.

**Reflection:**
What are the key issues here?
What is the role of the tutor in this situation?

**Student C**

Student C is a fresher new to the university, new to the area and new to the country, he feels very homesick and this all too much for him. The PT discusses these issues and finds out more about the student’s background and hobbies, he advises him to contact the International Student Centre and also to look at the Students’ Union website to look at the various activities on offer. The PT also suggests a group tutorial where he introduces student C to some other international students. There is an agreement to meet again shortly and the student is now settled and has lots of new friends and has joined a couple of societies.

**Reflection:**
What are the key issues here?
What is the role of the tutor in this situation?
Student D

Student D is in the final year of her degree programme, the Personal Tutor is going to discuss how to evidence the Staffordshire Graduate Attributes with the tutee, during the discussion the tutee speaks about her concerns about employment and careers options- the Personal Tutor refers the student to the Careers Centre who offer her assistance with writing a CV, interviewing skills and job searches.

Reflection: What are the key issues here?

What is the role of the tutor in this situation?