UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR

PERSONAL TUTORING

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UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

1.   Introduction

1.1   This Code of Practice sets out the minimum standards required to provide academic and pastoral support to registered students on taught programmes at the University. The student experience is intensely formative, requiring frequent monitoring through the Personal Tutor-student partnership. Tutorial and other support provision is designed to help students learn to manage and reflect upon their own academic and personal development, capabilities and skills.

1.2   This Code of Practice sets out a framework, which should be followed by Schools, providing support and development in the following areas:

    .1   Personal Tutoring and progress reviews;

    .2   Review of academic feedback;

    .3   Skills support and advice;

    .4   Signposting students to the most appropriate support structures (for issues such as welfare, finance and careers); and

    .5   Personal development planning.

1.3   This Code of Practice is underpinned by other cognate Codes of Practice and Regulations that deal with specific circumstances that may occur during the student lifecycle (e.g. Leave of Absence; Academic Integrity; Extenuating Circumstances). Postgraduate Research students should refer to the Code of Practice on Supervision and Monitoring of Research Students.

1.4   For the purposes of this Code of Practice responsibility for personal tutoring for students on Taught Postgraduate Programmes may be undertaken by the Programme Lead or by another duly designated member of staff.

2.   Responsibilities within the Personal Tutoring System

2.1   Units within Professional Services will:

    .1   Support the Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor (Student Experience) in their oversight of the Integrated Personal Care Network and the Personal Tutoring System;

    .2   Provide documentation, advice and guidance for Personal Tutors through the DPVC (Student Experience);

    .3   Provide a system of support, information, advice and guidance that assists Schools in addressing individual student's needs; and

    .4   Support the DPVC (Student Experience) in enhancing a community of practice among Personal Tutors, by providing information and opportunities for sharing common issues and good practice ideas.

2.2 The Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor (Student Experience) will:

.1 Maintain oversight of the Integrated Personal Care Network and the Personal Tutoring System within it, advising the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education), Director of Academic Services and Director of Student Services of risks, issues or opportunities both external and internal to the University, and will instigate the necessary actions to address them in a timely manner;

.2 Provide individual help and advice to academic members of staff in relation to their responsibilities as Personal Tutors, through the Senior Tutors' Forum, Welfare Tutors' forum, or individually, as appropriate;

.3 Act as a point of referral for individual staff and students where impartial or expert advice is needed to resolve academic issues, or for when all other sources of support have been exhausted;

.4 Support the development and maintenance of an Integrated Pastoral Care Network, by facilitating and monitoring interdependencies among relevant support systems in place at the University (including Personal Tutors, Senior Tutors, Welfare Tutors, Student Services and the Library);

.5 Produce and update relevant materials to support Personal Tutors.

2.3 The Senior Tutor, designated in each School by the Head of School, will:

.1 Provide guidance and leadership to all Personal Tutors within the School;

.2 Act as the first point of contact with the DPVC (Student Experience) to discuss best practice, training, materials, concerns, or other personal tutoring-related issues;

.3 Ensure that expectations in relation to Personal Tutoring are clearly defined and disseminated to staff and students and that School Handbooks and other materials are up to date in the areas relevant to them.

2.4 Responsibilities of the School

.1 The Head of School is responsible for ensuring that appropriate development and support mechanisms are provided for all students on taught programmes. . The Head of School, working with the Senior Tutor, should ensure that:

a) Every School has designated staff with defined responsibilities for:
- Personal Tutoring;
- Welfare Tutoring (see 2.4.7 for details);
- managing reasonable adjustments for disabled students;
- managing extenuating circumstances; and
- coordinating careers and employability support.

A combination of these roles may at times be held by one individual, but for purposes of work allocation (and associated points) should be addressed separately;

b) Registered Students following undergraduate or postgraduate taught programmes are, upon first registration with the University, assigned a Personal Tutor, or equivalent for postgraduate students, prior to arrival with an initial meeting scheduled within two weeks of the start of the student's programme of study. For undergraduate students this meeting should be held within Welcome Week or the first week of the teaching term;

c) Personal Tutors are drawn from among either academic staff or Teaching Fellows. It is expected that the Personal Tutor should remain the same for the duration of the student's registration, although cover arrangements should be made for research leave, sickness absence and other forms of planned and unplanned absence. Schools seeking alternative criteria for the selection of Personal Tutors must first consult with the DPVC (Student Experience) before obtaining the permission of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education);

d) Mechanisms are in place for staff to inform a student's Personal Tutor if they are not attending their scheduled classes.

.2 Schools should publish prospectively to students the Personal Tutoring arrangements in place, including dates and frequency of tutorials and procedures for monitoring attendance.

.3 Schools should work with the Careers Network to ensure students are provided with support in using e-personal development planning tools

.4 Specific consideration should be given within the School to joint honours (including major/minor) students and to students taking programmes with different modes of delivery, for example, distance learning, part-time, and those delivered off campus.

.5 In cases of students on joint programmes, Schools will identify a "home" School (where the student's file is normally held) and will assign a Personal Tutor from that School. Personal Tutoring should not be moved from one School to another during the course of a student's registration unless their programme of study changes.

.6 Induction and briefing materials should also be made available to Personal Tutors to ensure a consistent and confident approach to the Personal Tutor role. Within the information resources provided by the Senior Tutor, templates should be available, with sample model-agendas for tutorial meetings. The Senior Tutors' Forum should be used as a mechanism for reviewing and updating materials available to Personal Tutors.

.7 Schools should identify one or more members of staff to act as Welfare Tutors. The responsibilities of Welfare Tutor will vary according to School, programme and discipline, but as a minimum they will be required to:

a) Develop and maintain an updated specialised knowledge of the sources of welfare help and guidance available at the University, and advise Personal Tutors and students accordingly;

b) Act as a point of contact for pastoral issues for students who are unable or unwilling to discuss these issues with their Personal Tutor, or who have been referred to them by Personal Tutors;

c) Coordinate the collation and dissemination of information about student support and welfare issues within the School;

d) Support the response of Professional Services to student critical incidents and emergencies, if and when requested, following the appropriate University protocols; and

e) Attend specialised training and briefing sessions organised for Welfare Tutors.

2.5   Responsibilities of Students

.1   Students are primarily responsible for their own development and learning. They should access support, advice and guidance to improve and develop their academic work and personal skills, to enhance their University experience and to improve subsequent career opportunities.

.2   Students should obtain information about University systems and communicate with School staff and Professional Services to maximise the full range of support opportunities available to them.

.3   Students should ensure that they attend all tutorial meetings, including induction lectures or meetings, group tutorial sessions or individual tutorial meetings. It is the student's responsibility to attend the meetings booked with their Personal Tutor in the School and students should respond to opportunities for meetings with diligence. It is expected that students will communicate with their Personal Tutors if they are unable to attend the scheduled meeting or need to re-arrange the meeting, and should respond if their Personal Tutor contacts them. Failure to attend meetings may lead to action taken in accordance with the Code of Practice on Reasonable Diligence;

.4   Students should read communications from the School and/or the University to ensure they are aware of processes and arrangements for all aspects of their programme, particularly in terms of assessment, exams, extenuating circumstances and appeals. It is expected that they will access their University email account and read and respond to communications from the Department, School or University in a timely fashion.

.5   When communicating with staff by email, students should be aware that staff may only access email at set times and therefore an immediate response may not be possible. Further, students should not expect communication during statutory holiday and University closed periods.

.6 Students should keep their personal data up-to-date via my.bham, including term-time and home addresses, telephone number(s) and details of their General Practitioner.

3. Requirements for Personal Tutoring

3.1 All students should have an induction, at the start of their programme of study, which includes:

.1 A Student Handbook or resource that clearly states the requirements of the student in relation to issues such as extenuating circumstances, regulations, reasonable diligence, attendance requirements and plagiarism;

.2 A talk which covers the major areas identified in the documentation;

.3 An initial session, individually or in a group, with their Personal Tutor, where the School's student support schemes will be clearly explained to the student. The timing and nature of this initial session should be identified in School documentation and be within the timeframes stipulated in 2.4.1 b);

.4 An explanation of the student's responsibility towards managing their progress and the function of the tutorial system in that context.

3.2 A student's Personal Tutor should ensure that the student has contact details for them, including office telephone number and email address. Students should know how to contact their Personal Tutors, although arrangements will vary between Schools and Departments.

3.3 Personal Tutors will arrange at least three scheduled individual meetings during the academic year with each tutee (where face-to-face meetings are not appropriate, these may be e-tutorials). The Personal Tutor will contact the student for an individual meeting to be held within the timeframe stipulated in 2.4.1 b) and will meet the student thereafter at least twice per year. Students on Taught Postgraduate Programmes should meet with their Personal Tutors at the start of their period of study and then as appropriate for their course of study.

3.4 Although it is the responsibility of the student to act with reasonable diligence in communicating about and attending these meetings, Schools also have a duty to make reasonable attempts to contact students who are not attending them.

3.5 Personal Tutor meetings will focus upon the student's overall academic progress and other issues pertaining to, for example, module choices, feedback on assessments, employability, personal development and Year Abroad opportunities.

3.6 Personal Tutors should also request a meeting where concerns have been raised about a student's attendance at teaching session and/or engagement with their programme of study.

3.7 The student may raise any non-academic issues with the Personal Tutor, recognising that the Personal Tutor is there to signpost them to the most appropriate support services. The Personal Tutor should also remind the student of the importance of recording and submitting extenuating circumstances in the appropriate manner, and of the need to obtain appropriate evidence to support the extenuating circumstance

submitted. Discussions held with a Personal Tutor cannot constitute or substitute for the submission of a formal extenuating circumstance for consideration by Boards of Examiners or Extenuating Circumstances Panels.

4.   Careers and Skills Development

4.1   All students should be given advice from the beginning of their studies about support services available within the School and the University to help them to make career decisions, produce a CV and understand the career opportunities available to them, as appropriate.

4.2   Personal Tutors should therefore encourage students to understand and reflect upon the skills development embedded within their programme of study. To support this dialogue, Schools should ensure students have access to, and make use of, relevant materials and services available to facilitate personal development planning.

5.   Quality Assurance

5.1   The Head of School or nominee within the School must take responsibility for reviewing the arrangements for Personal Tutoring in place annually.

5.2   The University's quality assurance system should include mechanisms to ensure that appropriate Personal Tutoring mechanisms are in place.

5.3   Students and staff should be given an opportunity to feed into the policy and process for Personal Tutoring. Schools should demonstrate that this input has been considered and processes have been reviewed appropriately. This may be through normal School mechanisms for student and staff feedback, i.e. questionnaires, student/staff fora, student representation systems, staff-student committees etc.

5.4   The Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor for Student Experience will make regular reports to the Student Access and Progress Committee (a sub-committee of the University Education Committee) on the effectiveness of the Personal Tutoring systems in Schools and monitor compliance with the standards set out in this Code of Practice.