Aston University

PERSONAL TUTORING POLICY

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Introduction

This policy is part of the University's commitment to enhancing the student experience. It reflects issues and responses emerging from the NSS survey and other student feedback; positive features of personal and student support identified in audits and reports by the QAA and HEA; the NUS charter on personal tutors; and existing good practise in a wide range of institutions across the HE sector. It also reflects Aston's determination to provide strong personal care and support for our students during their time here.

It is more important than ever that universities are able to demonstrate robust student support arrangements that help underpin a high quality student experience. Personal tutors play a vital role in this support structure as a specific and consistent source of guidance, information and support for the student throughout their studies. They help students feel part of the Aston community and provide a personal touchstone for academic and pastoral matters. This in turn facilitates student induction, progression, engagement and retention. They are instrumental at building strong relationships with students and bring a greatly desired personal touch to the student experience.

This policy document sets out a framework of core principles for personal tutoring that will apply throughout the University. It is acknowledged that Schools of Study have different structures which may lead to some variations in the detailed operation of personal tutoring and academic and student support arrangements in general. These core principles set out a minimum standard of expectations for all students and staff, however, to ensure consistency and a comparable experience.

General

From the commencement of their programme, all campus based undergraduate and postgraduate taught students will be allocated a named personal tutor, who will be a member of academic staff from Aston University. They will normally be from the student's relevant School of Study but could be from any subject group in the School.

Students will be given the name of their personal tutor during Welcome Week (or equivalent induction period) at the latest. Personal tutors should aim to contact or meet with their tutees to welcome them as soon as possible.

Normally students should retain the same personal tutor throughout the duration of their programme. It is recognised that there are circumstances where this is not always possible such as staff changes, study leave, or periods of extended illness. In such cases schools/programmes must ensure that a student is reallocated to another personal tutor as quickly as possible and that there is minimum disruption for the student.

Students have the right to request a change of personal tutor and, whilst this will not be automatically granted, requests should be considered and not unreasonably declined.

The system for personal tutoring, the role of the personal tutor and the student's responsibilities will be made clear to students in the relevant programme handbook or related material and during the first meeting with their personal tutor.

Whilst distance learning programmes may wish to operate a personal tutor system it is recognised that this may not always be practical. In these cases other appropriate student and academic support arrangements must be put in place, approved by the relevant School of Study and reported to University Learning and Teaching Committee as part of an annual report on the operation of personal tutoring within the School. Any arrangement for distance

learning students must include an essential requirement that students are informed at the outset of the key contact points for support and guidance.

Personal tutoring for part time campus based students should adhere to the minimum standards for full time students but it is recognised that there may be a need to adjust the timing and frequency of meetings.

Role of the Personal Tutor

The personal tutor should be a student's first formal point of contact for general academic guidance and pastoral support. It is not expected that personal tutors are experts on all matters, however, but that they should: inform tutees of their availability and ensure they are available at relevant times; listen to students' issues or concerns sensitively and responsively; provide advice and guidance and be able to signpost students to other sources of support within the School, University or Union where required.

Personal tutors should help students settle in to University life both during induction and their subsequent re-orientation at the start of each academic year and following a period of placement activity, study abroad or leave of absence. They should make arrangements to meet with tutees on a regular basis to assist their continuing progression throughout the programme.

They should be a sounding board for any positive or negative issues related to the experience of their students and act as an advocate for their students as required.

Personal tutors must encourage tutees to attend meetings and make reasonable efforts to contact any who do not do so without prior notification and justifiable reason. However, ultimately it is the student's responsibility to attend meetings with their personal tutor.

Personal tutors should keep a minimum record of meetings with tutees but normally treat matters raised by students confidentially unless the student has authorised the disclosure. There are occasions when it would be inappropriate to maintain confidentiality however, such as if there are issues which may affect the student's progression or continuation on the programme which should be brought to the attention of other relevant colleagues or there are other exceptional circumstances such as concerns for the student's welfare or the welfare of others.

The personal tutor will support and encourage tutees to reflect upon and plan their personal, skills and academic development.

Personal tutors may provide tutees with general career advice, assistance and encouragement in preparation for placements (where appropriate) and suggestions for possible further study opportunities. However, it is not expected that personal tutors should be experts in any of these areas and they will direct students to sources of specialist support where required.

Personal tutors may also provide feedback following assessment and/or help students to reflect on feedback from other staff. They may guide students on module choices (where appropriate) and on matters relating to the students' overall progression on the programme.

The relationship that personal tutors build with their tutees is also important for the student's future career not only for reference writing but also keeping in contact after graduation.

Frequency and timing

The arrangements set out below are minimum standards. Schools may wish to provide additional opportunities for meetings with personal tutees. Furthermore students should be encouraged and expected to make additional ad hoc arrangements to contact or meet with their personal tutors if they have urgent concerns or pastoral issues they wish to discuss.

Personal tutors must meet with new students – including direct entrant students from another institution – as soon as possible. For full time undergraduate students this should be during Welcome Week or up to two weeks later. For postgraduate taught students, or part time undergraduate students, this should be within three weeks of the start of the programme.

For students in the second or subsequent year of study, a scheduled meeting with personal tutees must be arranged at or near to the beginning of each remaining year of the programme to assist with orientation and progression. For students on placement this would be done remotely via Aston e-mail.

All full time undergraduate or postgraduate taught students must be given at least two further opportunities to meet with their personal tutors during each year of study. These meetings may be at any time, though early in the second term and shortly before or after the summer assessment period may be particularly appropriate. Again, this would be done remotely for students on placement.

All part time undergraduate and postgraduate taught students must be given at least one further opportunity to meet with their personal tutor during each year of study.

Personal tutors may arrange to meet with tutees individually or in groups but there must be a minimum of one individual meeting each year of the programme and students should be encouraged to contact their personal tutor for individual confidential discussions at other times if necessary.

In summary, the minimum frequency of personal tutorial meetings will be:

	Full Time	Part Time
Undergraduate Taught	Minimum 3 meetings per year: One scheduled meeting at the start of each year of the programme. Two further opportunities for meetings provided throughout each year.	Minimum 2 meetings per year: One scheduled meeting at the start of each year of the programme. One further meeting opportunity provided throughout each year.
Postgraduate Taught	Minimum 3 meetings per year: One scheduled meeting at the start of the programme. Two further opportunities for meetings provided over the year.	Minimum 2 meetings per year: One scheduled meeting at the start of each year of the programme. One further meeting opportunity provided throughout each year.

Topics for discussion with tutees will depend on the requirements of individual students but the following themes should be covered as relevant.

Undergraduate taught students

Year 1

- Explaining the personal tutor system, the role of the personal tutor and the responsibilities of the student
- Helping the student to settle in to University life – seeking feedback on their induction experience
- Ensuring the student has access to/ received all relevant programme material – and encouraging them to read this
- That the student is sufficiently clear about their programme requirements; has module and timetable information etc.
- Awareness of importance of using University e-mail systems, Blackboard etc.
- Satisfaction with accommodation (where relevant)
- Provide guidance/reminder of other key programme/school contacts – including School Office - and University services including The Hub, Library, Learning Development Centre and Careers
- Guidance on professional body membership (where relevant)
- Guidance on student participation and representation opportunities
- Ensure students are aware of coursework submission arrangements
- Ensure students are aware of plagiarism procedures and implications
- Ensure students are aware of procedures for exceptional circumstances
- Assistance with interpreting feedback from assessment activities
- Any pastoral issues, queries or concerns raised by the student
- Their student experience: what do they enjoy, what don't they like etc.
- Work life balance – helping direct and inform students of possibility to work part-time
- At end of year: reflection on first year, how the student feels they have settled in and progressed, their personal, and academic development achievements, any outstanding issues or concerns

Year 2 (and 3 where appropriate) – also, other continuing years for part time students

- Helping students orientate and with their transition to the coming academic year
- Discussion on any issues which have emerged since the previous year
- Ensuring the student has access to/ received all relevant programme material for the coming year– and encouraging them to read this
- That the student is sufficiently clear about their programme requirements for the year ahead has module and timetable information etc.
- Helping the student identify/plan any personal or academic development priorities for the coming year
- Assistance with interpreting feedback from assessment activities
- Guidance/encouragement in preparation and application for placement opportunities (where appropriate) Discussing potential placements, i.e. if appropriate for them, benefits, etc. – but not specifics
- Guidance with final year module selection (where appropriate)
- Encouragement/guidance on careers support opportunities
- Any pastoral issues, queries or concerns raised by the student
- Their student experience: what do they enjoy, what don't they like etc.
- At end of year: reflection on the year, how the student feels they have progressed, their personal, and academic development achievements, any outstanding issues or concerns

Placement Year (where appropriate)

- Encourage students to contact and engage with their Placement Tutor /Essay Supervisor (where appropriate)
- Helping students orientate and with their transition to the coming academic year
- Discussion on any issues which have emerged since the previous year
- Ensuring the student has access to/ received all relevant programme material for the coming year– and encouraging them to read this
- That the student is sufficiently clear about their programme requirements for the year ahead
- Helping the student identify/plan any personal, professional or academic development priorities for the coming year
- Assistance with interpreting feedback from assessment activities
- Guidance with final year module selection (where appropriate)
- Encouragement/guidance on careers support opportunities
- Any pastoral issues, queries or concerns raised by the student
- Their student experience: what do they enjoy, what don't they like etc.
- At end of year: reflection on the year, how the student feels they have progressed, their personal, and academic development achievements, any outstanding issues or concerns

Final Year

- Helping students orientate and with their transition to the final year.
- Helping students orientate in their return from placement (if appropriate) and feedback on their placement experience.
- Ensuring the student has access to/ received all relevant programme material for the coming year– and encouraging them to read this.
- That the student is sufficiently clear about their programme requirements for the year ahead; has module and timetable information etc.
- Helping the student identify/plan any personal or academic development priorities for the coming year.
- Assistance with interpreting feedback from assessment activities.
- Encouragement/guidance on careers support opportunities and general information/advice
- Encouragement/general guidance on other post graduate opportunities e.g. PGT programmes, research.
- Their student experience: what do they enjoy, what don't they like etc.
- Any pastoral issues, queries or concerns raised by the student.
- Guide and support students to maintain work/life balance and deal with pressure and stress of final year.
- At end of year: reflection on the year and the programme as a whole. How the student feels they have progressed, their personal, and academic development achievements, any outstanding issues or concerns.

Postgraduate Taught Students

- Explaining the personal tutor system, the role of the personal tutor and the responsibilities of the student
- Helping the student to settle in to University life – seeking feedback on their induction experience
- Ensuring the student has access to/ received all relevant programme material – and encouraging them to read this
- That the student is sufficiently clear about their programme requirements; has module and timetable information etc.
- Awareness of importance of using University e-mail systems, Blackboard etc.
- Satisfaction with accommodation (where relevant)
- Provide guidance/reminder of other key programme/school contacts – including School Office - and University services including The Hub, Library, Learning Development Centre and Careers
- Guidance on Professional body membership (where relevant)
- Guidance on student participation and representation opportunities
- Ensure students are aware of coursework submission arrangements
- Ensure students are aware of plagiarism procedures and implications
- Ensure students are aware of procedures for exceptional circumstances
- Assistance with interpreting feedback from assessment activities
- Any pastoral issues, queries or concerns raised by the student
- Their student experience: what do they enjoy, what don't they like etc.
- Guidance with module selection (where appropriate)
- Guide and support students to maintain work/life balance
- Encouragement/guidance on careers support opportunities
- (Part Time continuing students) Helping students reflect on the end of each year and with their orientation and transition to the following academic year, discussing any issues which have emerged since the previous year
- At end of programme– reflection on the year and the programme as a whole - how the student feels they have progressed, their personal, and academic development achievements, any outstanding issues or concerns

Student Responsibilities

Students should maintain regular contact with their personal tutor throughout the duration of the programme.

They must attend all scheduled meetings with personal tutors or inform their tutors in advance if they are unable to do so and help make alternative arrangements (for students on placement year this contact would be maintained remotely via Aston email).

Students must arrange and attend further meetings with their personal tutors during the periods of the year when they are required to do so (for students on placement year this contact would be maintained remotely via Aston email).

Students should inform their personal tutor of any circumstances which might affect their studies or their ability to proceed or if they are considering withdrawing from their programme.

They should prepare for meetings with their personal tutor and be willing to act upon their advice including contacting or meeting with any other school or university colleagues to whom they are referred.

Whilst Personal Tutors must encourage tutees to attend meetings and make reasonable efforts to contact any who do not do so, without prior notification and justifiable reason, ultimately it is each student's responsibility to attend meetings with their personal tutor.

Support for personal tutors

Personal tutoring and pastoral care support will be incorporated within the Postgraduate Certificate of Professional Practice in Higher Education for new academic staff.

The University has developed an electronic "personal tutors' toolkit" http://www1.aston.ac.uk/clipp/personal-tutors-toolkit/ to assist new and experienced staff in this role, providing: a range of important material and useful guidance; essential sources of student support and services; key points of contact; information on procedural issues.

The University will also organise regular staff development courses and best practice sessions on personal tutoring.

Schools/programmes must ensure personal tutors are fully aware of the roles and responsibilities of other colleagues who can provide relevant advice to assist them or the student including: year tutors, programme directors, school office staff, placement tutors, Placements Team and senior managers.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Development requirements related to a personal tutor's role will be discussed as part of the annual PDR meeting.

In allocating personal tutor responsibilities, Schools should consider workload issues and be mindful of the numbers of tutees allocated to any individual tutor.

Schools/programmes must regularly review the effectiveness of the personal tutoring arrangements. This will include ensuring that it is considered annually through: a report on the operation of personal tutoring to the University's Learning and Teaching Committee; as part of the annual monitoring process; and through the analysis of NSS data, staff/student liaison committees and other student surveys and feedback.

The University will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of personal tutoring arrangements across the University through: University Learning and Teaching Committee annually considering School reports on personal tutoring arrangements; scrutiny of annual monitoring reports, analysis of NSS plus other student surveys, focus groups and feedback; staff surveys.

May 2012