UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR

PERSONAL TUTORING AND ACADEMIC FEEDBACK

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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:

1.2.1 Personal Tutoring and progress reviews;

1.2.2 review of academic feedback;

1.2.3 skills support and advice;

1.2.4 welfare issues; and

1.2.5 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 lifecyle (e.g. Leave of Absence; Plagiarism; 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 Tutor – Student Partnership

2.1 <u>Responsibilities of Corporate Services</u>

Units within Corporate Services will:

2.1.1 support the University Senior Tutor (hereafter “Senior Tutor”) in their oversight of the Personal Tutoring System;

2.1.2 provide documentation, staff induction, staff training and development programme (s) for Personal Tutors;

2.1.3 provide a system of support, information, advice and guidance that assists Schools in addressing individual students needs; and

2.1.4 support and enhance a community of practice amongst Personal Tutors, by providing information and opportunities for sharing common issues and good practice ideas.

2.2 Responsibilities of the Senior Tutor

The Senior Tutor will:

2.2.1 maintain oversight of their area of responsibility advising the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and Director of Academic Services of risks, issues or opportunities both external and internal to the University and instigate the necessary actions to address such issues in a timely manner; provide individual help and advice to academic members of staff in relation to their responsibilities as Personal Tutors;

2.2.2 act as a referral point for individual meetings with students and staff where impartial or expert advice is needed on resolving academic issues, or for when all other sources of help and support have been exhausted;

2.2.3 identify interdependencies and common themes emerging from the support systems (Welfare Tutors and Personal Tutors) in place at the University an ensure that resultant opportunities for integration are followed through;

2.2.4 analyse progression and retention data trends across a range of criteria (e.g. widening participation cohorts, ethnicity, gender) and work with colleagues in Corporate Services to address emerging issues; and

2.2.5 write and periodicially update information resources for all academic staff with Personal Tutor responsibilities.

2.3 Responsibilities of the School

2.3.1 The Head of School is responsible for ensuring that appropriate development and support mechanisms are provided for all students on taught programmes. How a School chooses to divide these duties is an internal issue, but the arrangements established should meet the framework described in this Code of Practice. The coordination of this function may be delegated to another senior member of academic staff in the School who should:

a) provide guidance and leadership to staff who are supporting students;

b) act as the first point of contact within the School for the Senior Tutor;

c) ensure that the understanding and expectations in relation to academic feedback and Personal Tutoring is clearly defined to staff and students; and

d) identify the nomenclature (for other roles specific to their School, departments or disciplines) and the associated functions in their School or programme handbooks. Every School should have designated staff with defined responsibilities for: Personal Tutoring; welfare tutoring; managing reasonable adjustments for disabled students; managing extenuating circumstances; and co-ordinating careers and employability support.

2.3.2 Registered Students following undergraduate or postgraduate taught programmes should, upon first registration with the University, be assigned a Personal Tutor 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.

2.3.3 Personal Tutors should be drawn from among either the permanent academic staff or from permanently appointed 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 University Senior Tutor before obtaining the permission of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)

2.3.4 Schools should ensure mechanisms are in place for staff to inform a student's Personal Tutor if they are not attending their scheduled classes.

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

2.3.6 Schools should publish prospectively to students the types of assessment and feedback on summative assessment that students should receive in each year of study. This information should be collated into a single information resource rather than dispersed into separate module study guides and include details of the date and format of the summative assessment, contribution to the overall module mark, deadlines for completion/handing-in, and method and timing of the feedback.

2.3.7 Schools should work with Careers and Employability to ensure students are provided with support in using e-personal development planning tools (such as >>Progress>> or PebblePad) (see 5.2 below).

2.3.8 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, those delivered off campus.

2.3.9 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.

2.3.10 Training opportunities, induction and briefing meetings should also be arranged 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 School should also liaise with the Senior Tutor to arrange training and briefing opportunities

2.3.11 Schools may also choose to 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;

c) co-ordinate the collation and dissemination of information about student support, extenuating circumstances procedures and welfare issues within the School;

d) with the Senior Tutor and Corporate Services, co-ordinate the School response to student critical incidents and emergencies, following the appropriate University protocols; and

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

2.4 Responsibilities of Students

2.4.1 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.

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

2.4.3 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 that are 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.

2.4.4 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. Students should be aware of, and access frequently, *my.bham* online portal.

2.4.5 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.

2.4.5 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:

3.1.1 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;

3.1.2 a talk which covers the major areas identified in the documentation;

3.1.3 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 2.3.2;

3.1.4 particularly identifying arrangements for students who are entering higher education for the first time; and

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

3.2 Student's Personal Tutors 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. This could be done through published office hours, bookable appointments or a regular tutorial slot, but it is important that students feel that they can contact their tutors, when necessary.

3.3 Personal Tutors will arrange at least three scheduled individual meetings during the academic year with each tutee (where the student is on a distance-learning programme, these may be e-tutorials). The Personal Tutor will contact the student for an individual meeting to be held within the timeframe stipulated in 2.3.2 and will meet the student thereafter at least twice per year. For students on Taught Postgraduate Programmes the three scheduled meetings may be a combination of individual and group meetings as appropriate.

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 academic progress, feedback on assessments, employability and personal development, and other issues such as module choices, options for placements and Year Abroad opportunities. Personal Tutors should also be alert to students who may present a risk to themselves or to others, drawing such concerns to the attention of other staff as appropriate.

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 should raise any welfare or non-academic matters which may be affecting their progress. The role of the Personal Tutor is to direct the student to appropriate resources and sources of support. Their 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. Discussion 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.

3.8 Personal Tutors shall designate one of their later scheduled tutorial meetings with first year undergraduates as a more thorough review of their progress. Further guidance on this process will be available from the Senior Tutor.

4. Academic Feedback

4.1 Arrangements for academic feedback will vary across the University, however, it would be expected that students receive specific feedback from module tutors on assessed work. These arrangements may include the Personal Tutor, but s/he should also provide reflective opportunities throughout the year for students to consider their overall academic performance to ensure that students have both specific feedback (in-course assessment) and discussion about overall performance.

4.2 Students should be given feedback on their academic performance in order to facilitate improvement and promote learning. Feedback from module tutors should focus on performance against module learning outcomes. Feedback themes can then be further discussed with the Personal Tutor. The link between the Personal Tutor and those teaching a student is therefore very important and all staff should ensure that there is effective communication.

4.3 All students should:

4.3.1 be given feedback within 15 working days of the submission date including periods when the University is not in session, but excluding University closed days. Where it is not possible for staff to meet this 15 day deadline, an agreed date for the return of work should be notified by the Head of School/Department to all affected students before the deadline;

4.3.2 be informed of specific quantitative (marks and grades) and qualitative (content and skills) feedback arrangements for all assignments and coursework prior to the submission deadlines;

4.3.3 be aware of who will issue feedback to them and how this will be communicated to them. This should normally be stated in the Student Handbook and at the time the assignment is set. The nature of feedback will vary between modules, but students should be aware of the mechanisms in place, which provide them with information to aid their improved academic performance.

4.4 Under 4.3.1, instances of non-compliance with the 15 working day deadline for the provision of feedback on assessment should be referred to College Directors of Education for action, and reported to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education).

4.5 Requests for exemptions to the 15 working day deadline for the provision of feedback on assessment should be submitted, in a timely manner, to the College Director of Education for endorsement and then to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) for approval.

5. Careers and Skills Development

5.1 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;

5.2 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, e-personal development planning tools that can be used in Personal Tutoring meetings with:

5.2.1 feedback and reflection on assessments;

5.2.2 skills development tracking – for inspection or discussion;

5.2.3 Careers and Employability Service information, tools and support;

5.2.4 generation of a CV; and

5.2.5 information relating to Personal Skills Award, internships and placement opportunities.

6. Quality Assurance

6.1 The Head of School or nominee within the School must take responsibility for reviewing the arrangements for Personal Tutoring and feedback in place annually. The policy and arrangements operated by the School should be reviewed and improved appropriately.

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

6.3 Students and staff should be given an opportunity to feed into the policy and process for personal tutoring and academic feedback. 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.

6.4 The Senior Tutor 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.