

**UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM****CODE OF PRACTICE ON PERSONAL ACADEMIC TUTORING**

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 At the University of Birmingham, every undergraduate and taught postgraduate student has a Personal Academic Tutor, a designated member of staff who provides academic guidance and advice. The role of the Personal Academic Tutor is to support academic progress and personal development throughout a student's time at the University. The tutorial process, supported by PebblePad (an online portfolio tool), should encourage students to understand and reflect upon the academic and personal skills development embedded within their programme of study and in their wider university experience. To support this process, students should be referred to the relevant career planning resources and support offered by the University's Careers Network, and academic skills services within the Library, to facilitate personal and professional development planning. From 2020-21, the majority of undergraduate students will also undertake Personal Academic Tutoring modules in their first year, which aim to use a small group learning format to support transition into University and enhance students' sense of belonging and inclusion as part of a credit-bearing module<sup>1</sup>. All other taught students (i.e. all students with the exception of first year Undergraduate) will receive a blend of group and individual tutorials to continue this approach.
- 1.2 This Code of Practice sets out the minimum standards required to support academic and personal development for registered students on taught programmes at the University. The student experience is intensely formative, requiring regular engagement and appropriate monitoring as part of the Student-Personal Academic Tutor Partnership. To help manage the student's academic experience, tutorials should offer guidance, assistance and appropriate support. Personal Academic Tutors work with their students to enhance their academic progress through engaging in reflection and improvement planning. It is key that Personal Academic Tutors recognise when any problems presented are beyond their competence, and at which point they must seek guidance and support for the student through the appropriate institutional referral processes (academic, career and wellbeing services).
- 1.3 This Code of Practice sets out a framework, which should be followed by Schools, providing support and development in the following areas:
- .1 Personal Academic Tutoring;
  - .2 Academic Skills Development (in conjunction with the academic skills services);
  - .3 Reviewing academic progress and feedback on assessment;
  - .4 Referral of students to the most appropriate support (for issues such as wellbeing, finance and careers);
  - .5 Personal Development Planning (planning for skills for life and work).

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that these modules will not necessarily be called 'Personal Academic Tutoring' modules, there will, however, be at least one module in a student's first year that will incorporate these principles.

- 1.4 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: Health, Wellbeing & Fitness to Study). Postgraduate Research students should refer to the Code of Practice on Supervision and Monitoring Progress of Research Students.

## **2. Responsibilities that support the Personal Academic Tutoring System**

### 2.1 The Director of Student Engagement will:

- .1 Maintain oversight of the Personal Academic Tutoring system, advising the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Director of Student Affairs of risks, issues or opportunities, both external and internal to the University, and 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 Academic Tutors, through the Student Academic Engagement Committee, Senior 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 when all other sources of support have been exhausted;
- .4 Facilitate and monitor interdependencies among relevant support systems in place at the University (including Personal Academic Tutors, Senior Tutors, Wellbeing, Academic Skills and Career Services);
- .5 Produce and update relevant materials for Personal Academic Tutors and Senior Tutors (including material relevant to Personal Academic Tutoring modules), and further develop (in consultation with Schools and HEFi) the online portfolio tool (PebblePad) to facilitate student engagement and personal development.

### 2.2 Academic Services, Professional Student Services and the Careers Network will:

- .1 Support the Director of Student Engagement in their oversight of the Personal Academic Tutoring System;
- .2 Ensure updated documentation and advice and guidance is provided for Personal Academic Tutors through the Director of Student Engagement;
- .3 Provide a system of support, information, advice and guidance to enable appropriate referral to wellbeing, academic and careers services that assists Schools in addressing individual students' needs;

- .4 Support the Director of Student Engagement in facilitating a community of practice among Personal Academic Tutors, by providing information and opportunities for sharing common issues and good practice;
- .5 Maintain and develop the online portfolio tool (PebblePad) that supports the tutorial process by ensuring that accurate student and academic tutor data are inputted at relevant times (i.e. beginning and end of each academic year).

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

- .1 Provide guidance and leadership to all Personal Academic Tutors within the School, including monitoring compliance with the Code of Practice and reporting problems to the Head of School, and ensuring the tutorial system meets the needs of all students;
- .2 Act as the first point of contact in the School with the Director of Student Engagement to discuss good practice, training, materials, concerns, or other academic tutoring-related issues;
- .3 Provide appropriate guidance to ensure that expectations in relation to Personal Academic Tutoring (and Personal Academic Tutoring modules) 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;
- .4 Act as the academic lead for liaison with wellbeing services providing academic advice regarding the reasonable adjustment and extenuating circumstances processes;
- .5 Act as a point of contact for students to discuss concerns about Personal Academic Tutoring.

### 2.4 The Personal Academic Tutor will:

- .1 Support academic progress and personal development throughout a student's University Career;
- .2 Arrange the required group and up to three scheduled individual meetings during the academic year for all students on full time taught programmes, as per the Tutorial Framework. Consideration should be given to the timing of tutorials in the context of the programme (for example, it is likely to be appropriate for a tutorial to take place when the results from the semester one assessment period become available). These tutorials will be supported by appropriate activities and will focus on academic progress and personal development. For the majority of undergraduate students, the activity undertaken in tutorials will be extended by the small group activity undertaken in first year Personal Academic Tutoring modules;
- .3 Respond to students' concerns using the appropriate institutional referral processes (wellbeing services, academic skills and career development):

- .4 Communicate to students the tutorial arrangements in place and provide contact details in case students face difficulties in accessing the personal academic tutor system;
- .5 Undertake relevant training to ensure familiarity with the Code of Practice, and a full understanding of their role.

## 2.5 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 Academic Tutoring that complies with the Code of Practice;
    - Wellbeing (Professional Services role);
    - Managing reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities;
    - Managing extenuating circumstances.
  - b) Registered Students following undergraduate or postgraduate taught programmes are assigned a Personal Academic Tutor on arrival. An initial group meeting with tutees should be organised by each tutor within two weeks of the start of the students' programme of study. For new undergraduate students this meeting may be incorporated within the relevant Personal Academic Tutoring module. The first individual tutorial (as supported by the Pebble Pad workbook) can be held later in this first half of the semester;
  - c) Personal Academic Tutors are drawn from among academic staff, Teaching Fellows or other individuals appointed specifically to undertake the role. It is expected that, where possible, the Tutor should remain the same for the duration of the student's registration. Where this is not possible due to, for example, sickness absence, resignations or other forms of planned and unplanned absence, a clear system must be in place to transfer students to a new tutor and to monitor the success of the transfer. It is recognised that some Schools have alternative systems in place for final year students and these must be monitored for compliance by the Senior Tutor in the same way as all systems. Schools seeking alternative criteria for the selection of Personal Academic Tutors must first consult with the Director of Student Engagement before obtaining the permission of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education);
  - d) Reasonable Diligence processes are in place for staff to inform a student's Personal Academic Tutor if the student is attending their scheduled classes.
- .2 Schools should ensure tutors publish prospectively to students their Personal Academic Tutoring arrangements (including an explanation of the linkages with the Personal Academic

Tutoring modules), including dates and frequency of individual and group tutorials and procedures for monitoring attendance;

- .3 Schools should work with their Partnership Development Manager (Birmingham Digital Education, HEFi) to ensure students are provided with support in using PebblePad development planning tools;
- .4 Specific considerations 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. Comparable tutoring should be in place<sup>2</sup> and a School's Senior Tutor will assure the quality of these specific arrangements;
- .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 Academic Tutor from that School. Personal Academic 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 be made available to Personal Academic Tutors to ensure a consistent and confident approach to their role. All tutors should receive appropriate training on the use of PebblePad for the recording of tutorial work. The Senior Tutors' Forum should be used as a mechanism for reviewing and updating materials available to all tutors and their students;
- .7 Colleges should ensure that staff and students are aware of the wellbeing services available to students. A Wellbeing Officer is the first point of referral for a Personal Academic Tutor. A tutor should respond to any student wellbeing concerns by referring the student to the Wellbeing Officer or appropriate wellbeing service.

## 2.6 Responsibilities of Students

- .1 Students are adult learners who have a responsibility to engage with the support available in order to optimise their learning and development and prepare them for their future careers. Students should ensure they have accessed and understood the information about the full range of support opportunities available to them;
- .2 The tutorial process is supported by a range of activities and reflective tasks within PebblePad, which is UoB's online portfolio tool. Students have a responsibility to attend and prepare for all individual and group academic tutorial meetings (including those which are part of Personal Academic Tutoring modules) using the activities within PebblePad;

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<sup>2</sup> A suggested tutorial approach for a part-time distance education student is (in each year of study): an initial introductory meeting by Skype or Zoom, and a mid-point review using PebblePad. Group tutorials can be facilitated through digital platforms

A suggested tutorial approach for an exchange student joining the University for one semester is: the School (or Department) arrange an initial (group or individual) meeting with the student and provide information about the range of University support services.

- .3 Students will receive relevant course information via their University email account and the Virtual Learning Environment (Canvas). They should read and respond to communications from their Department, School or University by the given deadline;
- .4 Academic tutors will always endeavour to reply to student emails quickly but it is important to remember that they have a wide range of duties, some of which require travel. If a request is urgent, a student can always see the Senior Tutor or Wellbeing Officer;
- .5 Students should keep their personal data up-to-date via the student gateway <https://student-gateway.bham.ac.uk/> including semester-time and home addresses, telephone number(s) and details of their General Practitioner.

### **3. Requirements for Personal Academic Tutoring**

- 3.1 All students should have an induction period at the start of their programme of study, which includes:
  - .1 A series of group tutorials focusing on the actions required by the student in relation to issues such as extenuating circumstances, regulations, reasonable diligence, attendance requirements and academic integrity, these should be supported by online resources or a student handbook;
  - .2 An explanation of all relevant support services (academic skills, wellbeing, careers) provided by appropriate professional services colleagues;
  - .3 An initial group session with their Personal Academic Tutor, which may be incorporated within the relevant Personal Academic Tutoring module. The timing and nature of this initial session should be identified in School documentation and be within the timeframes stipulated in 2.5.1 b);
  - .4 An explanation of the student's responsibility to use PebblePad as the tool for engaging with personal academic tutorials and managing progress.
- 3.2 A student's Personal Academic Tutor should ensure that the student has their tutor's contact details, including office telephone number and email address. Students should be aware of how their School and Department require them to contact their Tutors;
- 3.3 For all students on taught programmes, Personal Academic Tutors should arrange regular group and up to three scheduled individual meetings during the academic year with each tutee (and the majority of undergraduate students will additionally participate in small group activity as part of first year Personal Academic Tutoring modules), as per the Tutorial Framework.. The individual tutorials will be supported by appropriate PebblePad activities. Schools may also have additional activities and specific modules which support and develop the tutorial process;

- 3.4 Although it is the responsibility of the student to act with reasonable diligence in communicating about and attending these meetings (and relevant Personal Academic Tutoring modules), Schools also have a duty to make reasonable attempts to contact students who are not attending them. Personal Academic Tutors should firstly contact the student and subsequently communicate a student's absence to the Programme Lead as part of the Reasonable Diligence process. As part of this process Personal Academic Tutors (or nominated academic) 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.
- 3.5 Personal Academic Tutor meetings will focus on the student's overall academic progress and personal development. During these meetings, students will be able to discuss with their tutor the development of academic skills, response to feedback on assessments, employability, and personal development opportunities (such as volunteering or year abroad). These meetings will be supported by the activities in the PebblePad tutorial workbook and appropriate resources. Additionally, for the majority of undergraduate students, the focus on academic progress and personal development will also be embedded in and extended by first year Personal Academic Tutoring modules;
- 3.6 The role of a Personal Academic Tutor is to take an overview of a student's academic and personal development, so it is normally expected that they would be able to provide an initial reference for a tutee.
- 3.7 The student may raise any non-academic issues with the Personal Academic Tutor, recognising that the Personal Academic Tutor is there to signpost them to the most appropriate support services. The Personal Academic Tutor should also remind the student of the importance of recording and submitting extenuating circumstances information in the appropriate manner. The Senior Tutor (or Extenuating Circumstances Officer) can provide further advice to the student or Personal Academic Tutor regarding this process. Discussions held with a 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 The tutorial process and Personal Academic Tutoring modules, supported by the online PebblePad portfolio tool, should encourage students to understand and reflect upon the academic and personal skills development embedded within their programme of study. To support this process, students should be referred to the relevant career planning resources and academic services within the Library to facilitate personal development planning.

#### **4. Quality Assurance**

- 4.1 The Head of School or nominee within the School must take responsibility for leading an Annual Review of the Personal Academic Tutoring system (and associated Personal Academic Tutoring modules) ensuring compliance with the Code of Practice.
- 4.2 Students and staff are given an opportunity to feed into the policy and process for Personal Academic Tutoring. 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. Schools should demonstrate that this input has been considered and processes have been reviewed appropriately.

- 4.3 The Director of Student Engagement will make regular reports to the Student Academic Engagement Committee (a sub-committee of the University Education Committee) on the effectiveness of the Personal Academic Tutoring systems in Schools and monitor compliance with the standards set out in this Code of Practice.
- 4.4 The Director of Student Engagement is responsible for preparing an annual report on the compliance of this Code of Practice for University Education Committee.