

What is the role of the personal tutor?

All personal tutors at Worcester have three basic roles, the first is to support the personal development planning [PDP] of all their allocated tutees, the second is to act as first point of call for any tutees needing pastoral support, the third is to write official University references for the student. These roles are a minimum expectation and may be expanded in some subject areas to include additional functions such as placement support. The UW Student Handbook explains that the personal tutor provides the student with structured support to develop the following, which are key to effective PDP:

- Awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses
- A clear vision of what they want to achieve through HE study
- Greater understanding of how study in their discipline area at UW can help them towards their goals
- Responsibility for their choices in modules, work and social life
- A reflective approach to all the feedback they receive on their work
- A sense and a record of progression and achievement in their development of subject and generic skills and attributes [qualities]
- An ability to use this greater awareness to articulate the benefits of their HE experience to others including employers

The student handbook also mentions that the personal tutor:

- Responds to student requests for support and help with problems which affect their academic work either at subject level or by referral to other UW facilities
- Provides information for and assists in the drafting of UW references

Personal tutor group

The personal tutor is one of the student's regular points of contact within the University. Normally personal tutees will be allocated to you by Registry Services from students in your discipline and will remain with you throughout their undergraduate careers.

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Personal tutor meetings

How often?

Students would normally expect to meet their personal tutors four times a year, although occasionally a student may also need to contact you at other times, particularly if they are experiencing problems.

Group meetings

It can save tutor time by having group meetings, particularly if the information being discussed is the same for all students e.g. explaining the personal tutor role. It can also make sense for students to discuss their personal development planning with other members of the group. The personal tutor group is the one constant group to which the student belongs throughout their university career. It therefore has the potential for establishing a stable network of support for the student.

Individual meetings

Other meetings are best held with individuals e.g. when giving feedback and discussing grades from the previous semester. Sometimes the tutor will be approached by a student with problems. In these circumstances it is important to offer a private environment for the meeting.

The student with personal problems

The student with personal problems (which may or may not be affecting their work) should, in the first instance, be listened to. Try to encourage the student to find their own solutions rather than you providing the answers. The GROW model offers a simple structure for discussing any issues and guiding the student through to possible actions or resolutions:

- **Goals** – Encourage the student to define their issue and to establish what their goals are in terms of addressing it.
- **Reality** – Let the student tell their story, prompt thinking about where they are and help them to become more aware of their situation and their own role in it.
- **Options** – Help the student to define possible options available to address the situation.
- **Will** – Work to establish a commitment to changing the situation and a way forward towards achieving their goals. Clarify responsibilities for any actions.

Referring on

When working with a student with personal problems you will need, at some point, to decide whether you are able to offer help or to refer them on to more specialist services. If you decide the latter, it is a good idea to remain in touch with the student to monitor progress. If you are uncertain about whether to refer the student on then seek confidential advice from Student Services. You should encourage the student to take responsibility and make any appointment themselves if possible. Whilst you are not bound by any professional code of ethics (unlike, say, counsellors), students will nevertheless usually assume that their private conversations with you will remain private. So, always secure the permission of the student before you make any referral for them. If that permission is not forthcoming then an anonymous enquiry is usually the best way forward (you should contact Student Services).

Personal Development Planning

All programmes have some form of PDP embedded within them. Personal Development Planning is **'a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational, and career development'** (Guidelines for HE Progress Files – QAA). The personal tutor plays an important role in supporting this process by helping the student to draw together and make sense of learning across a range of contexts. The personal tutor can discuss academic performance across all modules as well as relevant extra-curricula activities.

Indicative items for meetings

The following sections give an indication of what might be covered in meetings on a typical 3-year degree programme. Because the most crucial time to support students is during their first year we have provided more detail for the initial meetings. The timing of meetings is again indicative and built around the academic year. Departments may make their own arrangements and suggest a different cycle of meetings.

The first meeting

This should take place during Welcome week. It could form part of the subject induction programme and be timetabled. It makes sense for the meeting to be a group one, not least because it enables the students to interact with one another. The meeting might cover:

- The role of the personal tutor and how they can contact you, including setting ground rules about the use of email and the speed of response that can realistically be expected.
- Ask how well induction is going.
- Has the student received their timetable?
- Do they know their way around the campus?
- Have they found appropriate living accommodation?
- Do they know how to operate e-vision (tell them Programme Advisors runs workshops on it)?
- Underline the importance of PDP. Discuss their goals and plans for HE study.
- Provide information on their programme of study (assessment issues including feedback, what to do if feeling uncertain about choice of modules, pathways etc, census week).
- Arrangements for next meeting.

Second meeting

This should be timed for mid-semester, to coincide with the first assignment. **This can be a group meeting.**

- The meeting should focus on easing fears about the first assignment, talk through how well the student has settled in and how they are planning their work.
- Discuss their expectations of HE study and their experience of its requirements
- Follow up any student with problems or who has been absent from sessions. If a student is clearly unhappy and is thinking of leaving do what you can and, if necessary, refer him/her to Student Services.
- If a student is unhappy with a course/subject it may be possible to change. Ask them to see a Programme Advisor.

Third meeting

This should take place during the inter-semester week before the start of semester 2.

- This is an opportunity to discuss provisional grades from semester 1 with each student. **For this reason it would make sense for these to be individual meetings.**
- Tutors could explore how well the students understand the feedback they are given and any general issues that emerge. What's going well and how can they improve?
- This is also a final chance to pick up on any study skills needs.
- Discuss student active participation in the relevant personal development planning provision. What are they learning about themselves, their learning and their subject?

Fourth meeting

This should take place mid-semester 2 to coincide with students' selection of modules for the next year.

- The personal tutor should be able to give advice on module selections from an academic subject perspective. Is the student aware of the options and the implications of choices?
- This might be a good opportunity to raise whether the student is thinking about a specific career. What options might best support any career aspirations?
- Discuss the sort of comments the students has been receiving on assignments. What strengths and weaknesses do the comments suggest? What improvements might the student make? How can these be carried through?
- Check awareness of the regulations regarding mitigating circumstances, appeals and cheating.

Further information

Staff development:

The Academic Development and Practice Unit offer the following sessions which you may find useful:

- Personal tutoring
- Supporting student personal development planning

Contact the Academic Development and Practice Unit for further information or see the website at:

<http://www.worc.ac.uk/adpu/>

Study skills support

You may find it useful to refer tutees to the range of study skill advice sheets, available online and in hard copy from the Peirson Library & the careers library. The titles available are as follows:

Essay writing

Learning at university

Learning journals

Making oral presentations

Minimising stress

Organising yourself

Plagiarism & referencing

Reading efficiently

Revision and exam skills

Study at distance

Taking notes

Using feedback to improve

your work

What does the question

mean?

Working in groups

Writing reports

All study advice sheets are available to view and download at:

www.worcester.ac.uk/studyskills or students can follow the links from their SOLE page.

This guide was written and collated by Ellen Williams and Dr John Peters.

For further information see the personal tutor website at:

www.worc.ac.uk/personaltutor

The second year: the first meeting

- Consider marks for year 1 and general learning experience – what has been learned about the subject or about themselves?
- What are the goals and plans for the second year?
- Are they involved in or considering getting involved in extra-curricula activity, Student Union activity or volunteering?

Second, third and fourth meetings

- Can be used to introduce concepts of research and independent learning; PDP as an ongoing process; what are the additional requirements of HE study at this level?
- Careers management skills. Have they visited the Careers Service to check out career options and begin thinking about preparation of CVs, etc.?
- Encourage them to think about their learning from any paid employment or to take up work experience opportunities.

The third year: first and second meetings

- Raise career planning. What do they intend to do after completing their studies and what can they do now to prepare for this?
- Suggest they get help (if needed) with interviewing technique, writing CVs. Check they let you have as much information as possible for references, particularly extra-curricular activity.
- What are their goals for the third year? Check on progress of Independent Study, what are they learning from third year study?

Third and fourth meetings

- Self-marketing: Can they express what they have learned from their time in HE? Could they 'sell themselves' to an employer?
- Career planning: have they consulted the Careers Service?
- Ask them to complete the Destination of Leavers survey after graduation.

Study skills

Underperformance can sometimes be addressed by improving study skills and there are a number of ways of dealing with this:

- It may be necessary to refer the student to a course tutor for further advice, or there may be relevant subject/course work or a module. Encourage the student to see the connections between what they are learning in such core modules and their other work.
- The Student Services run free study skills sessions involving no assessed assignments. Students can opt into specific sessions or participate in the entire programme.
- The Student Achievement Officer has placed a range of materials on the study skills website for students to access at: www.worcester.ac.uk/studyskills. See the box to the left for details.
- A study skill reading list is accessible from the study skills website and the library catalogue.
- The Moving On study skills package is very useful and is available in a number of ways including through the study skills website.
- Information and Learning Support staff provide extensive support for students including teaching UMSC 1500 'Managing and Communicating Information using IT,' in both semesters for UMS students.