Personal Tutor Handbook

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Personal Tutor Handbook

This handbook is designed as an induction and reference guide for personal tutors at Aston. It relates specifically to the established University [Personal Tutoring Policy](#).

Further information and guidance via the [Education Department CPD Blackboard Course](#). If for any reason you are unable to access, please email [TEL Support](#).

What exactly is a Personal Tutor?

A Personal Tutor is a professional who takes an active interest in, and provides direct support for, their tutees; A key point of contact for general academic guidance and support in study; An adviser and advocate.

Perhaps the most important role a personal tutor plays is in supporting students in feeling known by the University, becoming active in the academic community, and in developing confidence and agency in study.

As with all teaching relationships, it's fundamentally about developing a trust-based relationship in study. A Personal Tutor is friendly, but not a friend, counsellor, mental health support worker or Line Manager. Know your boundaries and maintain them.

What do I need to do?

Make sure you are available for your tutees, that you know them, and they know you, that you meet at least three times per year and record relevant details in MAP. Basically, help. You can also develop your approach through dialogue with colleagues, review of related University and School policies, and relevant CPD.

Does it make a difference?

Yes. Students regularly report support from their Personal Tutor as a critical factor in their success at Aston. It's a role that matters, and when it matters most can prove hugely significant for tutees. It is also a role that can be deeply enriching and fulfilling for Personal Tutors. It provides an opportunity to provide highly personalised support and to keep closely in touch with the student learning experience.

What does good personal tutoring look like?

Tutees know who you are and how to contact you, are comfortable in making contact and understand the reasons and benefits of doing so, feel more connected to the University and have a better understanding of Student Support services and opportunities, and are challenged and supported to achieve their potential.

Where can I get help and support?

If you have questions or need support in the role, you can speak to colleagues including a Senior Tutor, Year Tutor or Associate Dean for Education in your College. CPD workshops led by the Education Team are outlined in CORE. You will also have access to a range of information about your tutees and a point of contact for support in role. Student support is a team effort.

What are the key things to get right?

Get to know your tutees – Meet them as soon as they join Aston, close any communication gaps, break the ice, and get involved. Be clear about your availability and structure your approach to the role.

Help your tutees navigate – Make sure your tutees know what support is available, how to access this, and have the confidence to do so. Help them understand Aston.

Monitor engagement and act where necessary – If your tutee isn't attending, they might need your help. If they're highly engaged, they might really appreciate some affirmation for their efforts. Take time to check and keep in touch. Plan and schedule your time for key points in the academic year.

Record notes in MAP – Record details of your interactions and meetings with students. Record only facts and be transparent and open with tutees. Do not record sensitive, subjective or potentially contentious information.

How do I manage my time as a Personal Tutor?

Supporting tutees take time and organisation. It is important to schedule this in your diaries as you would teaching sessions. Plan. Put an hour in your diary to map out the academic year ahead and focus your work on where it can have most impact. For example, during induction and the initial part of study (critical first six weeks at Aston), around key assessment points, and when assessment results are published.

What do I talk about with my tutees?

Whatever you and/or your tutee consider most important at any given time according to the circumstances and context of the learner and their studies and/or approaches in the School or Department. For example, if it is an international student who has recently moved to the UK and is just starting their studies, how they are settling in, whether they have questions about their studies, are they aware of available support services, and even, have they made any interesting connections or discoveries in the city and started to develop new social networks, would all be worth exploring. If a student preparing for a placement year, how their preparations are going would be a more important focus. In all cases, be yourself, be authentic, model practice, and encourage your tutees to do the same.

I have a lot of tutees. How can I make that work?

Why not schedule some group meetings for all your tutees? This can provide opportunity both for you to maximise efficiency in terms of your own time, but also a chance to build community within your tutorial group.

Or task your tutees with emailing you a short update on their progress and experience each week? You can then schedule time to read and respond via email and make a note in MAP.

Run monthly drop-in sessions in a suitable location either on campus or online?

Make use of a Blackboard Discussion Board or other online community space?

What do I do if I have concerns about a tutee?

The most complex and nuanced question of all. We should of course, as Personal Tutors, be concerned about our tutees all the time, but responses to perceived risk should always be proportionate and aligned to the level of risk implied by the available information. This is always a judgement call. For example:

- If the perceived risk related to the concern is **LOW** (E.g., Attendance or engagement has declined or you have not had a reply to a point of contact such as an email requesting a response), you should at least discuss with others including the Programme Director as soon as possible and make an informed judgement about the potential need to escalate more formally or more widely. The primary responsibility always remains with the learner but when in doubt, consult and act. Always aim to engage with the tutee in order to develop a better understanding and signpost and advocate engagement with relevant support as appropriate.

- If the risk is perceived as **MODERATE** (E.g., Attendance or engagement has declined significantly or is substantial and/or if there is an active absence of any positive information or response to repeated contact attempts), escalate more formally as a matter of urgency within the programme team, a Senior Personal Tutor or relevant professional services department as appropriate.

- If the concern is **SIGNIFICANT** (E.g., There is active evidence of profound/serious/urgent risk to academic progression or personal wellbeing, either through direct experience, disclosed or reported information), act immediately, by referring the student to the Student Welfare Team, contacting the Campus Safety Team and/or the emergency services. If a tutee is judged to be at active risk of harm, it is our responsibility to act promptly and effectively.

You are not expected to take responsibility for tutees outside working hours or to respond to requests for support from tutees on this basis. Maintain your professional boundaries but take appropriate action in a timely manner if you ever have concerns about your tutees. Personal Tutors are a vital part of a whole Aston approach.

If a tutee contacts you outside working hours and you are aware of the communication, where information does indicate risk of harm, you have a duty of care to respond as determined by the Safeguarding Concern Policy. You should contact the Campus Safety Team immediately who are on duty 24/7. Note the reference chart below for supporting students in distress.

Aston's support services for Health and Wellbeing.

Aston's Campus Safety information.

Reference chart: Supporting students in distress.

Remember to log all communications and actionss via My Aston Portal (MAP). Tutees are not able to see the information logged but you should ensure that it is sensitive, detailed, accurate, and specific (E.g., include dates of communication and action). Note that students do have the right to request access to information recorded about them. This includes MAP, email, and supplementary records.

Structuring support

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

Foundation and Stage 1

- Explaining the personal tutor system, the role of the personal tutor and the responsibilities of the student.
- Helping the student to settle into 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.

- Provide guidance/reminders of other key programme/College contacts – including College Office - and University services including [Information for Current Students](), [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 academic regulations and good academic practice.
- Ensure students are aware of assessment regulations and exceptional circumstances procedures.
- Assistance with interpreting feedback from assessment activities and how to improve current performance and attainment.
- Helping the student identify/plan any personal or academic development priorities for the coming Stage.
- Assistance with interpreting feedback from assessment activities and how to improve current performance and attainment.
- Awareness of any pastoral issues, queries or concerns raised by the student and to direct the tutee to relevant University student support mechanisms.
- Encouragement/guidance on careers support opportunities.
- Work life balance, any personal issues, queries or concerns raised by the student.
- At end of Stage: reflection on first Stage, how the student feels they have settled in and progressed, their personal, and academic development achievements, any outstanding issues or concerns.

Stage 2 (and 3 where appropriate) – also, other continuing years for part time students
- All requirements included for stage 1.
- Helping students orientate and with their transition to the coming academic Stage.
- Guidance on module selections (where appropriate).
- Discussion on any issues which have emerged since the previous Stage.
- 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 Stage module selection (where appropriate).

Placement Stage (where appropriate)
- All requirements included for stages 1 and 2.
- Encourage students to contact and engage with their Placement Tutor/Essay Supervisor (where appropriate).
- Encouragement/guidance on careers support opportunities.

Final Stage
- All requirements included for stages 1, 2 and Placement Stage.
- Helping students orientate in their return from placement (if appropriate) and feedback on their placement experience.
- Encouragement/guidance on careers support opportunities and general information/advice.
- Encouragement/general guidance on other postgraduate opportunities e.g., PGT programmes, research.

- Guide and support students in dealing with the pressure and stress of the final Stage.
- At end of Stage: reflection on the Stage 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
- All requirements included for stage 1 and 2.
- At end of programme– reflection on the Stage and the programme as a whole - how the student feels they have progressed, their personal, and academic development achievements, any outstanding issues or concerns.