Principles of Personal and Academic Support

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Background

Differences exist within academic departments, in their structures, resources, and capacity that will influence their approaches to providing personal and academic support. These differences have to be accepted and accommodated and as such a single “one size fits all” solution to personal and academic tutoring is unlikely to work, particularly one that narrowly focuses responsibility down to a single staff member at the possible exclusion of other available resources, services and approaches.

Despite these differences it is necessary to provide an appropriate range of pastoral and academic support services to all taught students in a consistent and equitable way. There is, therefore, a requirement for consistency and compliance in the provision of an agreed set of principles across the institution. Academic departments will be accountable for meeting these principles; however this approach recognises that they may be met in a variety of ways which reflect departments’ individual characteristics, capacity and circumstances. The emphasis of this approach is on the equity and impact of the personal and academic tutoring provided rather than defining overly prescriptive role descriptions and structures.

Existing quality assurance processes, specifically the Policy and Guidance Review, will be used to continually assess the availability of and engagement with personal and academic support for all taught students. In this way monitoring is integrated into existing structures and processes, and strengthened and supported at an institutional level. A key benefit of integration will be to increase the ability for Professional Services to monitor the use of specialist support services, and develop an informed view of the breadth and scale of support needs within both the general student population and of specific student groups.

It is important that the provision of personal and academic support is integrated with existing recording and skills development systems, including The Feedback Portal and HEAR.

Principles

Principle 1: Equitable access for all taught students (UG, PGT, DL and PT)

Students have different needs and preferences, and should not be treated in the same way; however, all taught students should have access to the same levels of personal and academic support, including a named academic tutor, and understand what minimum contact they should expect. Departments should actively monitor the availability of and engagement with the support available.

Principle 2: Communication of benefits, roles and responsibilities

All students and staff in the department should understand the benefits of personal and academic support, and the shared responsibilities of all of those involved from within the department and across Professional Services. Departmental structures should promote efficient and effective administration
of personal and academic support, enabling academics or staff with specialist skills to focus on their area of expertise. Where pastoral care is separated out from academic support, this should be made explicit to students. Communication activities should underpin Principles 3 and 4.

**Principle 3: Proactive relationships and shared responsibilities**

Departmental structures and responsibilities should provide continuity of support, and enable tutors and tutees to establish effective and long lasting relationships that promote positive engagement within the academic community. Departments should strive to be proactive and anticipate the needs of students. Students should ensure that they are active participants and seek to make positive changes in their experience as learners and for success in learning.

**Principle 4: Promoting success for all students**

Personal and academic support is for all students, not just those facing issues or in need of help; it is integral to the student experience and should empower students to succeed in their studies and achieve their full potential. General advice and guidance should be provided alongside effective signposting to specific skills development opportunities. Students should have the opportunity to review and reflect on feedback with a member of academic staff, in doing so progressively developing students’ skills and their potential to build on knowledge and progress successfully.

**Principle 5: Effective provision of pastoral care and referral to specialist support**

Departmental approaches to the provision of pastoral care must enable staff to identify student support needs and refer students to specialist support services either within or outside the department. Advice and support should be provided with regards to extenuating circumstances that may affect engagement or progression. Departments should identify common issues being faced by specific student groups and adjust the provision of or access to support as needed.

**Departmental Guidance on the Principles of Personal and Academic Support**

To support academic departments in implementing these institutional principles, baseline expectations have been developed that set out the institution’s minimum expectations; and provides a self-assessment tool to support continuous improvement and quality assurance. This guidance document may be found on the LeTS Processes and Policies page - [https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/lets/pp/support/tutors](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/lets/pp/support/tutors)

This policy reflects the following dimensions of practice in the UK Professional Standards Framework for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: A4, V1 and V2.