Personal Tutoring at King's

It is university policy[1] that each department has a personal tutoring system. A personal tutor policy is essential as it provides a framework for each student to have an individual point of contact with an academic member of staff who will support them in making a success of their studies by taking an active interest in their academic progress and general wellbeing.

Each undergraduate and taught postgraduate student is to be allocated a personal tutor at the beginning of their programme of study. For postgraduate research students, their primary supervisor is responsible for pastoral care. Additional support is also provided by second supervisors, Faculty Heads of Graduate Studies and the Graduate School. Further details for postgraduate research students can be found in the university's Core Code of Practice.

Personal tutoring is overseen by the College Senior Tutor and Faculty Vice Deans (Education). In the Dickson Poon School of Law, personal tutoring is overseen by the Head of Student Experience (who is also Senior Tutor) and Faculty Associate Dean for Space, Social, Student Experience and in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities by the Faculty Senior Tutor. This revised Code of Practice[2] provides faculties and departments with a baseline for personal tutoring provision. It was discussed by the College Education Committee in July 2015 and approved in October 2015.

Personal Tutor Code of Practice

The university's code of practice on personal tutoring was agreed in 2012 and expressed in the *Guide to Being a Personal Tutor*. This outlined a baseline of provision for all undergraduate and postgraduate taught students and was supplemented by 'Good Practice in being a Personal Tutor', supporting variation in practice for some undergraduate courses (such as professional programmes with specific CPD or fitness to practise requirements) and for postgraduate taught programmes.

This revised code of practice is presented in light of the university's Education Strategy (2013-2016), which was approved by the Academic Board 11 June 2014 and by the College Council 24 June 2014. The Education Strategy identified a need for greatly strengthened individual engagement with students, with personal tutoring as the cornerstone of this vision. It works from the principle that engaged, approachable, knowledgeable, available and skilled personal tutors will facilitate positive university experiences for students, potentially transforming students' educational outcomes and

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[1] Policy is defined as "a statement and a set of guiding principles which defines the College's position on a particular matter. It is intended to reflect decisions and actions about how the College is governed". King's governance glossary.

[2] A Code of practice is "a set of standards relating to the practices and procedures followed in an area". *Ibid.*

opportunities. As such, this revised code of practice offers a shift in emphasis from 2012 in that the personal tutor's role is defined as offering a more proactive model of support both for students' academic progress and their welfare. It also outlines new expectations on faculties for supporting tutors' and senior tutors' engagement with training; for planning academic staff workloads to enable sufficient time for personal tutoring; and in developing a framework for organising personal tutorials based on themes and/or substantive items that support students across their years of study. This revised code therefore aims to ensure that proactive and responsive personal tutoring is a reality for all students at King's, particularly for undergraduates; it recognises that the role of the personal tutor in supporting postgraduate taught students may require a greater degree of flexibility. It is followed by a revised section on Good Practice.

Resources supporting personal tutoring are available via the College's **Personal Tutor Portal**: https://internal.kcl.ac.uk/staff/help/personaltutors

The role and responsibilities of personal tutors

Personal tutors:
- provide support and encouragement to ensure that students feel known as individuals and supported to make a success of their time at King's
- provide tutees with the opportunity to 'review & reflect on' their academic progress
- be a responsible person with whom the tutee can discuss any difficulties that they may be experiencing
- refer students at the earliest appropriate opportunity to professional services within the university in order to support them in resolving any difficulties
- allocate time to meet with tutees, and be proactive in arranging meetings and following up any unexplained non-attendance by reporting this to the senior tutor
- keep accurate and factual records of their meetings with students, in line with established good practice guidelines, treating all tutees' personal information sensitively, in line with university policy on confidentiality
- respond promptly to emails from tutees (within three working days). If staff are unavailable students should be made aware of this information
- provide written references for tutees, when requested. Requests for references must be made in a timely manner to give the tutor adequate opportunity to produce the reference
- will attend relevant introductory or refresher personal tutor training, as relevant to their time at King's, and engage with resources and other training opportunities designed to support and enhance the personal tutor role

The responsibilities of faculties and departments in delivering personal tutoring

Faculties:
- ensure that the personal tutor code of practice is implemented across schools, departments and programmes. Faculty Senior Tutors (where appointed) and

Vice Deans (Education) will play a key role in leading on this area;

- will promote and encourage good practice in personal tutoring via department and Faculty Education Committees, 'away days' or other relevant fora
- should ensure that students are provided with regular opportunities to feedback on their experiences of personal tutoring via Staff Student Liaison Committees or other student experience fora, and that mechanisms are in place to ensure that actions taken in response to the student voice on this area are communicated to students in an organised and timely way
- ensure that all departments appoint a senior tutor. For larger programmes it may be necessary to appoint more than one senior tutor. Faculties with a large number of departments may also decide to appoint a Faculty Senior Tutor to work with department Senior Tutors and the Vice Dean (Education)
- ensure that the role of the personal tutor is included in students' handbooks (in print and online) and reinforced by the personal tutors at the first meeting
- ensure that all personal tutors have contact with their undergraduate students within their first week at university in order to personally introduce them to the department. For postgraduate students on large taught programmes these meetings may need to be held later to allow for the enrolment of all students.
- ensure that personal tutor systems enable personal tutors to meet their undergraduate tutees at least 4 times in the first year and at least 2 times in subsequent academic years. Group tutorials where possible are encouraged to allow students to meet one another, however students must also be offered the opportunity to be seen individually. Personal tutors should meet with their tutees on taught postgraduate programmes at least twice a year.
- support heads of department and senior tutors in promoting and monitoring engagement with personal tutor training
- ensure that personal and senior tutors have access to personal tutor resources, including Student Records and the personal tutor 'Dashboard' and students' academic progress records, according to local practice
- ensure that personal and senior tutors are supported in taking up further training opportunities, particularly those designed to embed inclusive practice in personal tutoring.

The role and responsibilities of a departmental senior tutor

Departmental senior tutors:
- ensure that a robust system for personal tutoring is in place within the department, in accordance with the baseline outlined above and in consultation with the Dean of Faculty, Head of Department, Faculty Senior Tutor (where appointed) and Vice Dean (Education)
- provide an induction for new personal tutors to ensure that they are aware of the requirements of their role and that they have access to resources supporting personal tutoring
- see that all students are allocated to an appropriate personal tutor by the start of the academic session
- inform and advise personal tutors, where appropriate, of the declared disabilities of their tutees when allocating students to personal tutors. The senior

tutor should be aware of any additional support that might be required by a disabled student and the impact this may have on personal tutors' time

- ensure that information is made available to students, through course handbooks and during induction talks, on how the personal tutoring system works, including their responsibility to make good use of it
- act as a focal point for personal tutors within the department, providing leadership and support to personal tutors in their role including ensuring engagement with relevant training
- take referrals from colleagues who are not in a position to assist a particular student, particularly where the situation involves a student identified to be 'at risk' or who is seeking approval for changes to their registration status
- represent the department on the relevant Faculty Student Experience Forum or, where appropriate, delegate this responsibility to a senior colleague
- act as a point of contact within each department for members of professional services staff who are responsible for student support
- monitor the involvement of personal tutors in the personal tutoring system, referring to Heads of Department those who are not fulfilling the role adequately
- ensure that students have the opportunity to feedback on the personal tutorial system via a standing item on the agenda of Staff-Student Liaison Committees
- engage with training and development opportunities available to senior tutors through the university Senior Tutor Network
- act as a contact point and liaison for Student Services staff and the College and/or Faculty Senior Tutor
- Where a faculty has a significant number of academic departments, consideration should be given to identifying another senior tutor at faculty level to act as a point of contact for senior tutors in departments. The Faculty Senior Tutor or equivalent would continue to represent all departments at university level on matters of student welfare including attending the relevant Senior Tutor Forum, chaired by the College Senior Tutor.

Personal Tutoring at King's

Good practice in personal tutoring

1. Supporting student learning and progress, and promoting opportunity

A personal tutoring system is sometimes described as a 'safety-net', and whilst this welfare aspect of the role is essential, personal tutors should *proactively work with students to support learning and promote other opportunities* in order to make a success of their studies at King's. As such:

1.1 Personal tutors will work within their departments, schools and faculties to provide regular occasions, in line with existing policy on personal tutoring, for students to discuss their academic progress, wellbeing and goals. Personal tutorial discussions should be based around three elements: reviewing & reflecting on academic progress; a 'welfare check' (asking if the student is experiencing any difficulties, and referring for specialist support as necessary); providing an opportunity to discuss co- and extra-curricular opportunities, such as study abroad or internships. In all discussions of opportunities or difficulties, the personal tutor is not expected to be the expert, but to provide the neutral, friendly and ongoing support and encouragement that will enable students to access specialist support, as required.

1.2 If a student is identified as having significant difficulties with his or her academic work then the personal tutor may contact the student in question and discuss with the student, possible reasons for their poor performance. The problem may be academic or study skill-related, though frequently it will be fundamentally non-academic in nature e.g. illness, family or other social problems, financial and/or loss of motivation. In attempting to assist the student to deal with the difficulties, whatever they may be, the Tutor may advise the student to seek professional help from, for example, student support services staff. Encourage the student to discuss their difficulties by asking open-ended questions that aid thinking and feeling.

1.3 Personal tutors should be prepared to enter into discussion and possibly advise, either personally or by referral, specific non-academic topics of relevance to university life, such as accommodation, health and welfare, careers and financial matters. This will require tutors to have a clear understanding of the range of specialist support available to students at King's, and to be skilled in making timely referrals to appropriate services in order to support students' welfare and success. The new Personal Tutor Portal provides the resources necessary for this aspect of the role.

1.4 It is vitally important that personal tutors know the outer limits of their professional competence. The main focus of the personal tutor's role in dealing with a personal problem is to listen and assist the student in deciding on the next step to take which, in many cases, will be to discuss the matter with the appropriate professional services.

1.5 It is essential that personal tutors get to know the arrangements for tutoring within their faculty/school/department and get to know the key staff who are responsible for coordinating areas such as study abroad students and disabled students. These include the Faculty Disability Liaisons and the Study Abroad Tutors.

1.6 Personal tutors should also be aware of the university's regulations - both academic and those concerning students. The Personal Tutor Portal will provide easy access to these for tutors.

1.7 When a meeting with a tutee has taken place, personal tutors should make a record of the fact, with the date of the meeting. Records should be kept of any significant matters relating to tutees. The personal tutor should know - and follow - the system that exists within the department for keeping records about their tutees. In accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998, informal records kept by tutors should be adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to their purpose; accurate and up to date; and should not be kept any longer than necessary for their purpose. Clear guidance on record keeping is available via the Personal Tutor Portal.

1.8 In very rare circumstances a meeting with a distressed student could develop into an emergency situation. Tutors should therefore be informed of the procedure for dealing with such cases by consulting the guidance on the Personal Tutor Portal.

1.9 These measures outlined above should ensure that students have at least one member of staff who they know has been charged with a specific responsibility for supporting them, and who they know they can call on for advice or support.

2. *Taking a substantive approach to personal tutorials*

Key to improving staff and student engagement with personal tutoring is a clear sense of purpose to the tutor-student interaction. As such, it is good practice to *structure tutorials around substantive agenda items that complement the student lifecycle*, enabling students to identify and seek specialist support and co-curricular opportunities to support and enhance both their studies and their university experience more generally. As such:

2.1 On some programmes, personal tutoring will be integrated into the curriculum or included in a student's timetable. Where personal tutoring is not integrated or timetabled, it would be good practice for programmes or departments to establish and communicate a schedule of meetings at the start of the academic year that students and tutors follow.

2.2 Personal tutoring policy recognises that some programmes will hold group tutorials. Incorporating group tutorials into a schedule of meetings is good practice as it enables students to get to know one another and to develop a group identity linked to their personal tutor, however tutors should also be available for one-to-one meetings with their tutees, as required.

2.3 This document includes templates for organising personal tutorials on undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes, laying out a framework that includes the three core elements outlined in 1.1, and which can be adapted and personalised at department or programme level (see *Appendices A & B*).

3. A tutor-student relationship with clearly communicated expectations

Key to ensuring that staff and students see value in personal tutoring is clear communication on the purpose of the role and relationship. It is good practice for *personal tutorial meetings to be based on a clear set of mutual expectations*. As such:

3.1 Students will understand the personal tutor's role before they join the university; once on course, they will be presented with clear information in their first few days, in line with existing university policy, about the purpose and value of the personal tutor's role, the schedule of meetings and the key elements that meetings will address. This information will be available on the King's website and should be included in students' handbooks at programme, department and faculty level.

3.2 At the first meeting between the personal tutor and tutee the personal tutor should check that students have received information on personal tutoring and have received their programme/department handbook that will give them essential information on support and guidance during their time in their programme as well as some essential university regulations. Students should also be made aware that they can ask for their personal tutor to be changed, and also that there are other tutors in the department to whom they may turn.

3.3 Personal tutors should meet or make contact with each incoming tutee when they start/return to King's, and then at regular intervals throughout their programme according to university policy and in-keeping with local practice (e.g. at the beginning and end of each semester or termly). Keeping in touch via email outside of meetings is encouraged.

3.4 During the year the personal tutor should also be available for unscheduled consultation, which individual tutees may require. This can be carried out in person, by telephone or by email. Although it is important to encourage students to make use of email facilities for standard communication, please note that it is not a suitable means for transmitting confidential, personal or other sensitive information. If communicating by email, the university policy is that staff communicating with students should use the students' King's email address. All incoming students are made aware of this.

3.5 Tutors are not expected to be constantly available for students' consultation but to arrange 'office hours' at which they see students on either an open or an appointment basis. Tutors must ensure that students are aware of their availability, and also that they know what arrangements exist within the department should an urgent consultation be required. If a tutor is concerned that a student is becoming too dependent they should address this with the student following advice from a senior colleague, such as the senior tutor.

3.6 Tutees should be made aware that they are expected to attend scheduled meetings with their personal tutor and that unexplained absences will be noted and followed up.

3.7 Tutors should follow up any unexplained absence from meetings on the part of their tutees by email and, if no reply is forthcoming, the senior tutor or other academic with overall responsibility should be notified. Attendance of students at personal tutorials is not compulsory for some programmes and students may deliberately decide to opt out. It is, however, good practice for students to be encouraged to attend personal tutorials and for tutors to ascertain the reason for non-attendance as this is often one of the early indications of a student having difficulties.

3.8 In line with university policy and guidance on confidentiality, personal tutors should clearly explain how a request for confidentiality may restrict a tutor's ability to help a student - for example, where a student does not wish others to know about their disability.

3.9 Only if the personal tutor feels that there is a risk of significant harm to either the tutee or others, should thought be given to breaking confidence. In this situation, students should still be given the chance to consent to extending confidentiality and should be given a clear explanation for why it is necessary. In this scenario, the Student of Concern procedure should be followed.

3.10 Personal tutors have a friendly, but purely professional relationship with their tutees. It is important to understand the boundaries this entails. Personal tutors are encouraged to get to know their tutees in more relaxed social settings, but these should normally be restricted to university events. Personal tutors should be aware of and follow university policy on relationships between staff and students.

4. Supporting and monitoring the work of personal and senior tutors

Effective personal tutoring underpins a positive university experience for students, and, as such, the personal tutor and senior tutor roles are *valued and will be promoted, supported and rewarded* for the vital part they play in putting a personalised learning at the heart of the King's vision. Equally, it is important that faculties ensure that personal tutoring policy is followed by all schools and departments, that staff are allocated the necessary time to fulfill their responsibilities as a personal tutor, and that individual tutors are accountable to their line managers for meeting the requirements of their role. As such:

4.1 Personal tutor resources, accessed via a clearly signposted 'portal' on the university intranet, will support tutors in day-to-day personal tutor practice, providing clear, concise and up-to-date information and good practice so that student support, skills development and opportunities can all be clearly signposted.

4.2 The Senior Tutor Network will ensure that all tutors are regularly updated on university-wide policy or procedures related to personal tutoring, as well as central services and opportunities for students. The Senior Tutor Forum will ensure that academic staff can contribute to the development of new strategies and initiatives supporting students in these areas.

4.3 To reward excellence in personal tutoring, a new annual award will be introduced to run alongside the Teaching Excellence Awards established by the King's Learning Institute [KLI].

4.4 In order to support good practice in personal tutoring, faculties should ensure that their workload models include personal tutoring as a core duty for academic staff members (including time for associated administration, writing references etc.) and that personal tutee numbers are distributed, or the time commitment recognised in such a way, that there is enough time for the appropriate level of individual support. For example, some faculties will identify a number of hours of staff time per tutee, per year to be an indicative time commitment to be factored into their workload models. This would include time for associated personal tutor administration, but would not specify a limit to the time that a tutor has available, especially where tutees are identified to require additional support. Similarly, some faculties will

identify a maximum number of tutees that each tutor could reasonably support in line with the university's code of practice

4.5 All new personal tutors should attend introductory personal tutor training, as available via the King's continuous professional development offering on Skills Forge, and that take up of this training is monitored as part of the annual Performance Development Review process for all staff and monitored by Heads of Department, supported by Vice Deans (Education). Current personal tutors are expected to engage with a rolling programme of 'refresher' training that will be delivered within departments. Additionally, personal and senior tutors will be encouraged to enhance their understanding of equality and diversity issues and inclusive practice, by taking up Mental Health First Aid and Unconscious Bias training.