The University of Edinburgh

Policy

ACADEMIC AND PASTORAL SUPPORT
AT EDINBURGH
Standards and Guiding Principles, 2013/14

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Purpose  The aim of this document is to set out standards and guiding principles for the provision of academic and pastoral support to students across the University.

Overview  The University’s approach to supporting its students has three key features:

a. support arrangements are provided using a blend of localised provision, within Schools and Colleges, complemented by a range of specialist central services\(^1\). Local frameworks of support differ in a variety of ways from School to School, depending on level of study and how teaching and learning are organised and support delivered to the students concerned;

b. there are a range of providers and forms of provision, which need to take an integrated approach; and

c. the approach relies on everyone involved – staff and students – playing their part in making it work well.

The Standards and Guiding Principles do not, therefore, prescribe a uniform approach. Instead they seek to ensure that

- there is clarity amongst all students and staff about their respective roles and responsibilities;
- the scope, nature and accessibility of support within each School and College and centrally is well-understood; and
- the quality of the support provided consistently exceeds threshold standards across the University.

Scope  The Standards and Guiding Principles apply to all staff in roles where they support students. It is a University-wide policy. All staff and students of the University must adhere to the standards and act in accordance with the guiding principles. The Academic and Pastoral Support Standards and Guiding Principles was adopted by the Senatus on 16 June 2010. The Learning and Teaching Committee oversees the implementation of the policy.

a. Preamble

1. The University is firmly committed to providing all of its students with effective academic and pastoral support. These Standards and Guiding Principles were first adopted by the Senatus on 16 June 2010. They have been revised to incorporate the new and strengthened arrangements being introduced from September 2012 onwards, under the Enhancing Student Support project\(^2\). The overriding aim of the project is to ensure that, over the next decade and beyond, students have access to a framework of guidance and support that builds on the best of current practices, meets contemporary needs, and is of a quality and consistency appropriate to a university of high global standing.

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1 \(^1\) [http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff-students/students/student-services](http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff-students/students/student-services)

2 The work of the project is not reiterated here but links are provided to relevant information: [https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Home](https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS/Home)
Aims

2. The aim of this document is to set out standards and guiding principles for the provision of academic and pastoral support to students across the University. The University’s approach to supporting its students has three key features:
   a. support arrangements are provided using a blend of localised provision, within Schools and Colleges, complemented by a range of specialist central services. Local frameworks of support differ in a variety of ways from School to School, depending on level of study and how teaching and learning are organised and support delivered to the students concerned;
   b. there are a range of providers and forms of provision, which need to take an integrated approach; and
   c. the approach relies on everyone involved – staff and students – playing their part in making it work well.

The Standards and Guiding Principles do not, therefore, prescribe a uniform approach. Instead they seek to ensure that
   • there is clarity amongst all students and staff about their respective roles and responsibilities;
   • the scope, nature and accessibility of support within each School and College and centrally is well-understood; and
   • the quality of the support provided consistently exceeds threshold standards across the University.

3. Underpinning the Standards and Guiding Principles is the expectation that all members of the University, whether staff or students, treat one another fairly, courteously and equitably, with mutual respect and understanding.

b. Student Support in Schools and Colleges

4. Key roles within a new Personal Tutor system have been developed as part of the Enhancing Student Support project: Personal Tutor, Student as Personal Tutee, Senior Tutor, Dean of Students and Student Support Officer. Each School must inform the students taking its courses and programmes about the academic and pastoral guidance and support available to them, and how to access it. This information must be updated annually and will be presented in a variety of forms (paper, online, face-to-face communication).

Key Point of Contact

5. Within each School, there must be a readily accessible, student-facing office (e.g. the teaching organisation, a subject or departmental office) which serves as the primary point of contact for students seeking advice and information. It should ensure that students' enquiries or requests are promptly and courteously dealt with, and that where necessary students are directed to the appropriate member of staff or source of information. Usually this key contact point will be provided by the Student Support Officer, or an equivalent in the Student Support Team in the School administration. Where a member of staff is not available, it is the responsibility of the School to provide an alternative point of contact.

Scope and Focus of Provision

6. Whatever framework of support is available within a School, there must be provision for all its registered students, whether undergraduate or postgraduate, full or part-time, home or international, campus-based or online/distance. In the case of the latter, Schools will need to spell out how and what support can practicably be provided.

7. Schools are also expected to identify when and where the need for informed guidance and

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3 http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff-students/students/student-services
4 Descriptions of the key roles and responsibilities within the Personal Tutor System can be found here: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS
support may be at its most acute (e.g. on induction and in a student's first few weeks as an undergraduate or postgraduate; during the process of progression to honours), and to target and concentrate provision accordingly.

**Clarity and Communication**

8. Each School has a Tutoring Statement\(^5\) which outlines how the School will meet the University’s standards and expectations for student support. It must be clear to students in each School:
   a. what the first point of contact is for students seeking academic or pastoral advice, and what the fallback contact is should the first not be available.
   b. who to approach, within and beyond the school, for different kinds of information, advice and support.
   c. what guidance and support can appropriately be expected, and how promptly, from within the school.
   d. what other sources of information and support beyond the school students can be alerted or referred to.
   e. what is expected of students to ensure that queries and concerns are promptly raised and pursued.
   f. how a student should proceed where the need for advice is perceived as urgent.
   g. how a student can seek a change in their designated Personal Tutor or other advisor.
   h. how a student can lodge a complaint when the promptness or adequacy of the support available falls below the standards of provision set.

**Roles, Responsibilities and Expectations**

9. Within Colleges and Schools, a key role in academic and pastoral support to undergraduate and taught postgraduate students is that of the Personal Tutor (PT), who will help the students who are their Personal Tutees to take an active partnership approach to their learning. For postgraduate research, that role is typically played by their research supervisors. Since it is desirable that all such students should, if they so wish, be able to seek academic or pastoral guidance from a third party, Schools should designate one or more staff to fulfil this back-up role. Each School also appoints a Senior Tutor to ensure that PTs are adequately supported; to liaise with central services; and to ensure that the PT system is operating effectively in the School.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Tutor: Core Purpose</th>
<th>Student as Personal Tutee: Core Purpose</th>
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<tr>
<td>A1. to assist students in reviewing their academic progress and performance across the various courses that make up their chosen programme of study</td>
<td>B1. to reflect on their academic performance</td>
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<td>A2. to provide opportunities for students to reflect on how their learning within and outwith the formal curriculum can help them in pursuing their longer-term future development</td>
<td>B2. to reflect on how their learning contributes to their longer-term aspirations</td>
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<td>A3. to help foster in all students a sense of belonging to a community of learners</td>
<td>B3. to engage as a member of a community of learners</td>
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\(^5\) School Tutoring Statements are available on the ESS wiki: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/PESS
Limits of Pastoral Responsibilities

10. While Personal Tutors and other academic and administrative staff have a responsibility for supporting students, they are not usually qualified to provide specialised pastoral care, nor expected to do so. Consequently, in cases where a student appears to be experiencing severe distress (e.g. serious physical or mental health problems), he or she should be encouraged to seek appropriate professional help.

11. It may occasionally be necessary for School staff to establish explicit boundaries regarding the type and amount of support that they can offer, especially if the student is reluctant to seek professional support or if their behaviour is having a disruptive effect on others. The Head of School (or their delegate) and the relevant College Dean must always be consulted in such cases.

12. Very occasionally, in cases where there is perceived to be a serious risk to the safety of the student or of others, it will be necessary for the usual principles of confidentiality to be superseded by the need to seek assistance from appropriate agencies (e.g. health services or police).

Monitoring and Quality Assurance

13. Each School and College must ensure that the adequacy of guidance and support arrangements is monitored annually through quality assurance procedures, and that appropriate action is taken to address reasonable student concerns. Monitoring should combine information-gathering within the School (for example, via course or programme questionnaires and staff-student liaison committees) and scrutiny of relevant external sources such as National Student Survey data.

14. The outcomes of monitoring within Schools must form part of the annual quality assurance procedures of College and Senatus Quality Assurance Committees and be incorporated into periodic subject reviews (e.g. TPRs and PPRs). Enhancement monitoring and evaluation of the activities within the Enhancing Student Support project will initially be reviewed as part of the project.

15. Monitoring of the quality of provision across Schools should be complemented by the use of staff review procedures (PDR/appraisal) to keep under review the effectiveness of all academic and support staff in student advisory and support roles.

Briefing, Training and Development

16. An effective framework of support depends on the knowledge and skills of all those staff – academic, administrative, clerical and technical – who have responsibility for providing information and guidance. For briefing and training this is a shared responsibility between Schools, Colleges, IAD, other support services and EUSA. Schools and Colleges must therefore ensure that adequate opportunities are in place for briefing, training and updating, and that these are taken up by the various members of staff concerned. Formal training opportunities will be supplemented by informal training and mentorship/ongoing training which Schools will be able to tailor to suit their own needs.

17. Initial and continuing professional development opportunities should desirably be a blend of local and central provision, with the aim of ensuring that on the one hand, there is attention to College- and School-specific needs and practices, and on the other, expertise and insights are shared across the University, standards are consistent, and there is effective interchange between local providers and central services and mutual understanding of respective strengths.

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The University is strengthening arrangements for supporting students with critical needs and the needs of staff in dealing with such cases. See, for example: [http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/student-disability-service/staff/supporting-students/help-distressed-students](http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/student-disability-service/staff/supporting-students/help-distressed-students)
18. In such professional development activities, it is particularly important that consideration is given to the growing diversity of the University's students and its implications for support needs and provision.

**Oversight and Accountability**

19. How responsibilities for providing and overseeing student guidance and support are allocated may vary from one School to another, but overall responsibility rests with each Head of School for ensuring that an appropriate framework of provision is in place and that it is working well.

20. Similarly, Colleges, through their Deans of Students and Deans of Learning and Teaching and their Learning and Teaching Committees or equivalent, are responsible for overseeing the quality of provision across Schools. Job descriptions and committee remits should reflect this.

21. **Central Support for Students**

**Introduction**

A wide range of student support, in academic, pastoral, administrative and domestic areas, is made available to students through central support services, which are a vital complement to provision in Schools and Colleges. The effectiveness of these services, and the cohesion between them and the wider academic University community, are fundamental to a high quality student experience.

22. Many support providers operate to benchmarks, kite marks or professional standards which are specific to the nature and context of the service they provide. A blanket response would be unhelpful and potentially restrictive. Articulating a defined set of guiding principles will, however, help in managing expectations and ensuring that provision is fit for purpose and responsive to changing student needs.

**Expectations and Standards**

23. Central providers of support services to students are expected to make clear, through a range of appropriate channels:
   - the services and support they offer
   - who can access these services
   - an initial point of contact and advice on the best method of communication

24. Such services should deal with requests and enquiries accurately, promptly and efficiently, publishing a clear description of what students and their advisers can expect from them, including response times. They should also make every effort to find the answer to a query or, where necessary, refer students to the relevant person, section or department.

25. Service units should maintain and develop effective links with other areas of the University, EUSA and external organisations in order to facilitate effective referral and coherent delivery of student support. They also contribute to professional development programmes for staff in Colleges and Schools with responsibilities for student support.

26. Where a service is not able to offer support to a student, a clear explanation must be given of the reasons for not doing so.

27. All staff delivering the service are expected to be appropriately qualified, trained and supported in their roles, to ensure an appropriately high quality service is delivered.

28. Services must seek regular feedback from users, and make clear who students should contact with a complaint, compliment or suggestion. They will also make clear how any complaint will be handled.
29. Services must also monitor and review their performance regularly, taking on board and acting upon feedback from students and Colleges, while respecting and utilising the professional expertise inherent within the service, publicising results as required.

30. Services should strive to develop and enhance their provision wherever appropriate and feasible, ensuring that the services they offer are supportive of the University’s wider goals and consistently meet the realistic expectations of the changing student population.

31. Services are expected to participate in appropriate quality assurance processes within the University and/or within their professional arena.

d. Sustaining the Quality of Student Support University-wide

32. The University’s website should directly link students and their advisers to a centrally maintained list of regularly updated information, including Frequently Asked Questions about academic and pastoral support. This facility would help achieve greater accuracy, accessibility, speed and consistency in the provision of information and advice.

33. The original Academic and Pastoral Support Standards and Guiding Principles were endorsed by Senatus in June 2010. It is the responsibility of the University’s Learning and Teaching Committee to review them and amend and update them as necessary.

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<th>DOCUMENT CONTROL</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Date for next review</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Section responsible for policy maintenance &amp; review</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Related Policies, Procedures Guidelines &amp; Regulations</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Policies superseded by this Policy</strong></td>
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