UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER

THE ROLE OF THE ACADEMIC ADVISER
A guide for staff

2023/24

Contents

Preface

It is understood that each Academic Department has its own arrangements for providing academic, pastoral and professional development tutorial support. The role has a variety of names between the Departments including Academic Adviser, Personal Academic Tutor and Professional Development Adviser.

These roles have many strands in common and the purpose of this booklet is to provide advice and guidance where this is relevant to each particular role.

In order to simplify the wording in this booklet the term 'Academic Adviser' is used as the 'catch all'.

1. Introduction

This guide has been developed to assist Academic Advisers and other staff within Academic Departments who have a pastoral element within their role.

It is reviewed annually and supplemented by a range of resources and policies from all cross-University professional service departments.

The Policy on the role of the Academic Adviser outlines a statement of intent and the rights and responsibilities of both staff and students. It also contains guidance on how the systems of Academic Advising should be implemented within Academic Departments and Directorates. It can be found on the Academic Adviser help page in the 'useful links' section:
https://help.chi.ac.uk/academic-adviser-student-support-information

This Guide is designed to give individual tutors some practical advice and information, which we hope will be particularly useful for colleagues new to the role, to help you to:

- develop your confidence in the role of Academic Adviser and support your students more effectively;

- familiarise yourself with the Policy on the role of the Academic Adviser and the way the system works in your own department or directorate;

- explore some common issues that students may raise and ways of dealing with them;

- understand the range of specialist support offered by Student Support and Wellbeing, other professional departments and other agencies, and when and how to refer students to other people.

2.   What do Academic Advisers do?

Students arrive at University with widely different attitudes, prior learning and expectations and with different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Students may have succeeded easily at school, college or other prior entry route, and then find it hard to adapt to the more independent atmosphere of University. Alternatively, they may have experienced academic failures in the past and struggle with low self-confidence.

Academic Advisers are a key contact point between the University and the student. As an Academic Adviser you can offer support at a more individual level than is sometimes possible within a formal teaching context, especially on large programmes. Your role is therefore a vital one and it is important that you know what is expected of you and how you too will be supported.

A surprising number of students, especially in the early months, will assume that everyone else is coping well and that any difficulties they experience must mean they are on the wrong programme or even unsuited to higher education as a whole. As an Academic Adviser, you have the opportunity to put these anxieties into perspective and guide your students through any initial difficulties. You can help to establish realistic expectations, encourage effective study patterns, and generally contribute to a more fulfilled student experience.

You may also offer continuity throughout the programme and beyond, writing references or offering informal advice long after graduation, particularly as part of an ongoing subject-specific network.

3. Implementation of the Academic Adviser Policy by your Department

The University's Policy on the Role of the Academic Adviser can be found on the Academic Adviser help page in the 'useful links' section:

https://help.chi.ac.uk/academic-adviser-student-support-information

It outlines what is expected of Academic Departments, Academic Advisers and students.

There is an expectation that written guidelines for staff and/or students describing how the tutorial system operates in your Department will be in place. You may also find it useful to discuss the following issues with your colleagues:

- *How do students know what to expect?*

- *Are students normally allocated an Academic Adviser for the duration of their programme or for a specific year?*

- *For how many students are Academic Advisers or their equivalent usually responsible?*

- *Who is the designated member of staff responsible for leading on Academic Advisers within the Department?*

The tutorial system within your Department should be reviewed regularly and it is useful to discuss suggestions for improving the procedures and guidelines with your colleagues.

The guidelines for students should be in the programme handbook which is also reviewed yearly.

If you have any outstanding questions about what is expected of you after you have read this guide, please discuss these with your Head of Directorate, Department, designated line manager or an appropriate colleague.

4.   Managing expectations

Even within a clear policy framework, the term "Academic Adviser" can be interpreted in disparate ways, and this can lead to problems if staff and students bring different expectations to the relationship. It is helpful to be aware of your own assumptions and whether these are appropriate to current circumstances and constraints.

a)   Think about your own experience as a student and the academic/pastoral support you received:

- What was the most positive aspect?

- What could have been improved?

- What qualities did your tutor(s) bring to the role?

b)   How would you like your students to perceive you as an Academic Adviser (eg as a mentor, supervisor …)?

There are no right answers here. The important thing is to be aware of your own preferred tutoring style, and where this might conflict with other expectations or the demands of a particular situation. There is some advice later in this guide on boundaries between the different roles.

5.   First meetings

New students will be allocated an Academic Adviser at the start of their programme, so plan for an introductory meeting as soon as you receive your list of new tutees.

Ideally, this first session should be programmed into induction week for all tutorial groups. Even if this is not yet a standard feature in your Department, try to arrange a brief group meeting with your new students during induction week. This is a good way to introduce yourself and to set the scene for future meetings.

If there is enough time, aim to structure the discussion to help the group explore any questions and anxieties they may have.

For instance:

- You could ask the students to talk in pairs for a few minutes about their expectations of the programme, and together make a list of any questions about it or starting University. Pairs can join up into small groups to compare their lists, followed by the group as a whole sharing ideas on how to resolve any common issues. This reassures them that they aren't alone in their concerns, and that their fellow students will be a source of support.

- Encourage them to recall previous experiences of transitions (such as starting secondary school or a new job) and the kinds of strategies that were most successful in helping them to settle in.

- Answer any direct questions about the programme, but remember they may already be feeling overwhelmed with information at this stage, so don't overdo it.

- The Programme Handbooks may include several other ideas for working with first year groups to help them find out about the programme and each other. Some of the questions suggested below for a first individual tutorial could also be adapted for a group session.

If you are unable to schedule a group tutorial at this stage, then send a welcome note to each one of your tutees, introducing yourself and inviting them to come and see you individually. Let them know where and when they can find you, whether you offer regular 'drop-in' sessions and how they should sign up for an appointment.

The first tutorial meeting is important to help establish a comfortable working relationship. Sue Wheeler & Jan Birtle (Wheeler & Birtle, 1993) suggest some open-ended questions as basic starting points for a first tutorial:

- *Tell me something about yourself*

- *How do you feel about being here?*

- *How does the University differ from your school or college?*

- *What do you expect from your experience here?*

- *What kind of extra-curricular activities do you hope to become involved with?*

- *Is there anything that you are anxious about with respect to being a student?*

- *What personal resources do you have that might help you to settle in here and enjoy yourself?*

- *Have you thought about what kind of career you would like to follow?*

(Wheeler & Birtle, 1993)

It is useful for you and the student to discuss and agree any points for future action, and to note these down. See the section on 'Written records and confidentiality' on page 7 for more on recording tutorial notes and actions.

At this stage, it is also worth clarifying tutorial ground-rules and explaining the overall purposes of the tutorial system. Students should be aware that you are not just here to help with problems, but that the prime function is to offer support for their overall academic and personal development (see page 13 on Personal Development Planning).

6.   Location of tutorials

If students need to talk freely about confidential matters, they need to know how long they have and that they won't be overheard. If you share an office with colleagues, you may need to find somewhere else to hold tutorials. In your own room, you could use a sign on the door to deter interruptions.

Some institutions have introduced policies to restrict one-to-one meetings, to avoid accusations of harassment on either side. At Chichester this has not normally been considered necessary, but if you do have any concerns about appropriate rooms or other arrangements for tutorials, discuss them with colleagues to help you identify practical solutions. For instance, you could keep the door open, use a teaching room or one with a glass panel rather than a small, enclosed office, or arrange for a colleague to be nearby.

7.   Written records and confidentiality

It is helpful to take a few minutes at the end of any tutorial meeting to review what has been discussed and confirm any actions that have been agreed. For example, a student might have decided to focus on improving essay-writing skills, or to keep a diary for a week to help with time-management.

Encourage students to keep their own written notes of the summary and agreed action points. This helps them to take ownership of any decisions and to act on them, rather than perpetuating a more passive 'parent/child' relationship in which you are expected to sort out any problems for them.

Your Department may already have a formal system for recording tutorials, with a copy for the student and another for the student file in the Department office. If not, sample proformas can be found in the Useful Downloads section of the Academic Adviser help page: https://help.chi.ac.uk/academic-adviser-student-support-information

Any recording system raises the question of confidentiality - how confidential are Academic Adviser tutorials expected to be? It is important that students feel they can trust you enough to talk freely, but it is equally necessary to be clear about any limitations on this. The importance of clear guidelines on information about disability is discussed in the next section on page 8. Similar principles should apply to any other personal information disclosed in tutorials. If it may affect the student's ability to fulfil the demands of their programme, encourage them to let relevant staff know about it or ask if they would like you to do this on their behalf, but don't do so without explicit permission. Whatever is agreed about disclosure to staff, you should of course never discuss information from individual tutorials with other students without their written consent.

You should not feel obliged to keep confidential any information where there is a genuine concern for the student's safety (for instance where they have expressed thoughts of suicide) requiring notification to a colleague in Student Support and Wellbeing or to their GP or other specialist help. There is a section on difficult situations and referrals on page 24.

8.   Students under 18 years

Each year a small number of students will be under 18 at the start of their undergraduate programme. These students need particular care in academic and other settings such as University managed accommodation. Departments will be informed if a student is under 18 at the start of their programme, and your Head of Department, Programme Leader or Year Tutor should notify you if one of your tutees is under 18.

In whatever capacity staff and students engage with under 18s they must be aware of the special duty of care which must be afforded them. Please see the University Safeguarding and Prevent Duty Policy which can be found under the 'Student Support Policies and Guidelines' on the main Policies web page: https://www.chi.ac.uk/about-us/policies-and-statements/academic-and-student-support. Section 6 in particular addresses the issue of the under 18s.

9.   Students with disabilities or medical conditions

9.1.   Reasonable Adjustments

Students may have a disability, health condition (including a mental health condition) or specific learning difficulty (such as dyslexia) which requires adjustments to the way they are taught and/or assessed to enable them to make the most of their studies. When a student declares such a disability they will have their case assessed by an appropriate Disability, Dyslexia or Wellbeing Mental Health adviser. Any identified 'reasonable adjustments' will be agreed and documented on a SARA (Student Additional Requirements Agreement). The student will be given a copy of this and a copy will be passed to the Department Administrator who will ensure the Head of Department, the Academic Adviser and relevant others receive it. The Head of Department will consider, agree and sign it.

The agreed 'reasonable adjustments' will also be logged on their ChiView student page. You can access this information by clicking on the 'details' link where the 'Disability / Add Info' is 'Y'. (Please note, if you do not have the 'details' link you may need to request this permission from your Programme Lead).

The information will not contain details of the student's disability but will simply log their teaching and learning requirements and their exam and assessment adjustments. There are also two tiles on your ChiView page 'Student Additional Req' by course and by module which list all students with reasonable adjustments by course and year or by module.

Requirements for adjustments to teaching and learning may include physical access requirements, adjustments to handouts and course materials and human assistance required.

9.2.   Tutorials

It is particularly important for students with disabilities to meet their Academic Adviser at an early stage of the programme, to explore any support needs or necessary adjustments to teaching or assessment strategies, and provide a sound basis for regular progress reviews. However, don't assume that all students with disabilities will necessarily have problems. Most will have effective strategies in place before they enter higher education, and will simply require a reasonable level of flexibility and good communication with their tutors.

Your Department Administrator should notify you of tutees with a SARA, but it may also be advisable to check the student's record on ChiView for Staff for the Disability Flag.

- Check your general understanding of disability issues by looking at the Disabilities and Medical Conditions web pages on https://www.chi.ac.uk/student-life/support-health-wellbeing/disability-dyslexia-and-medical-conditions/

- Check that you are aware of any individual students with declared disabilities, so that your initial communications can take this into account. For instance, could a student with a visual impairment cope with the signing-up sheet on your door? Will a deaf student lip-read or communicate with you through a signing interpreter?

- Consider how to ensure that any students who subsequently develop a disability, such as a long-term illness or mental health difficulties, would feel comfortable about letting you know about this.

- Make a note of any particular questions you may have about working with students with disabilities, and discuss these with your Head of Department, Programme Leader or Year Tutor and other colleagues.

- If you need specific advice, talk to the Disability and Dyslexia Service by telephoning 01243 812076 or by emailing disability@chi.ac.uk

- It is important that any agreed reasonable adjustments documented in the SARA are achieved. In your subsequent meetings with the student you should check that the arrangements are working satisfactorily, the necessary adjustments are in place and that they are receiving the support they need to make the most of their time at University.

  If the student feels they are not receiving the adjustments recommended in the SARA you should try to identify why this is. If it is something that can be implemented by the Department then you should raise this within your team or with the member of your Department concerned. If, however, it is because you feel the adjustment is not possible for you or your Department to achieve then you should discuss this with the Head of your Department/Programme Leader/Year Tutor as they would have agreed that this could be achieved. It would be necessary then to discuss this further with the student and the service which raised the SARA in the first place (Disability Service, Wellbeing etc).

- The Disability and Dyslexia team carry out 'spot' checks to ensure that a student's agreed needs are being met.

- If work experience or a placement is included as part of the programme the student may also require 'Reasonable Adjustments for Work Experience' (RAWE). It is helpful if you can encourage the student to ensure that any such adjustments have been identified and documented by the relevant Student Support and Wellbeing service and that their Placement Coordinator (this may be the Careers Service) has been notified.

9.3. Student disclosures of disability

Legislation and institutional guidelines protect equality of educational opportunity but have shifted the balance between confidentiality and disclosure. For instance, under the Equality Act (2010), if a student discloses a disability to any member of staff, then the institution as a whole is considered to be aware of this and could therefore be in breach of its duties if reasonable adjustments are not made in response.

As an Academic Adviser you need to be aware of what to do if a student declares a disability during a tutorial or develops an impairment or physical or mental health condition during the course of their studies.

Where this happens, you should get the student's permission and/or agreement in writing to pass the information to the DDS service. You should then send the student's details to the DDS service at disability@chi.ac.uk. If the student refuses permission for the information to be passed on you are advised to keep a record of this and explain that the University will be unable to make adjustments for the disability or medical condition unless the student meets with the relevant adviser in Student Support and Wellbeing (Disability and Dyslexia, Student Health or Wellbeing Mental Health Advice).

10. Arranging regular appointments

The University policy states that students are entitled to a scheduled meeting with their Academic Adviser to review their academic progress on a regular basis, at least twice a year. It is your responsibility to arrange these meetings.

What would you do if a student on your list:

- *has not signed up or has missed a tutorial?*
- *had not responded to a direct invitation to see you?*
- *had given programme tutors cause for concern e.g. by poor attendance or failing coursework?*

It may be helpful to compare your responses to these questions with your colleagues.

Although there are arguments in favour of encouraging students to take the initiative themselves, the disadvantage is that those in greatest need of support or review are most likely to fall through the net.

Particularly in the early stages of the programme, it is best practice to schedule meetings for all students and follow up any non-attendance. Research into retention has shown that an early appointment for an informal discussion about how students are settling in will help them make the transition to university more effectively and identify any issues or concerns before these reach crisis point.

Another advantage of setting a fixed time for subsequent tutorials or periodic progress reviews is that both Academic Adviser and student can prepare in advance. You can look over the student's assessment results etc, and they can be encouraged to identify recent successes and areas for improvement, to help focus the discussion. The introduction of personal development planning (see next section) can help to provide a useful focus and framework for these regular reviews.

Most programmes will have key times in the year when many students are facing common issues, such as examination nerves, and it may be worth arranging an extra group tutorial rather than dealing with queries on an individual basis.

- *What would be the most suitable times in your programme for two regular meetings per academic year?*

- *What topics might be raised at each stage of the programme?*

- *Are there any key points in the academic cycle where a group tutorial session could help students address common issues?*

- *Are there any arrangements for encouraging students' own self-help or tutorial support groups?*

- *Peer Mentoring schemes have been trialled in some Academic Departments in previous years with some success. Please contact Vito Mastrolonardo at v.mastrolonardo@chi.ac.uk for more information.*

- *Do you want to invite colleagues from Wellbeing, Student Health, Student Money or Careers into your group tutorial to support you to address a specific issue (see page 26 for a list)?*

11. Personal Development Planning

All university students in the UK are now expected to engage in a process known as personal development planning (PDP). This has been implemented by Academic Departments and Directorates in different ways depending on the requirements of the different programmes. Some programmes have introduced PDP within specific modules, while others have embedded it across the programme and/or through the tutorial system. Check with your Head of Department or the relevant Programme Leader or Year Tutor if you are not sure how PDP is expected to link to the tutorial system.

PDP is designed to encourage students to take more responsibility for themselves and their own development, and to make connections between their programmes and life beyond the University. It can also foster a more pro-active and mature approach to academic work, reducing support needs and making tutorials more purposeful and enjoyable for you both. Encouragement from staff is an important success factor, so it is helpful to invite students to go through their achievements at tutorials as a starting point for your discussion. However, they also need to understand that ownership and responsibility for their personal development planning as a whole belongs with them.

A pre-arranged agenda can form part of regular tutorial meetings at each stage, dependent on the programme structure. For instance, following on from the suggested topics for a first meeting a scheduled review towards the end of Level 4 might include attendance or discussion of coursework results using feedback from module assignments to help the student identify areas for development. Later meetings might focus on such topics as module choices, preparation for placements, dissertation subjects and career plans. Careers and Employability are key and should be embedded in a student's programme.

It is good practice to use the final tutorial meeting of a degree programme to agree a summary of the student's achievements and

qualities, based on the evidence they have been gathering for their HEAR portfolio. Keeping such a summary on file will be extremely helpful when answering future reference requests.

12. Unscheduled meetings

Whatever the policy on scheduled meetings, students may also need to see you at other times. Some tutors put tutorial timetables on their doors or online for students to sign up to, while others run 'drop-in' sessions at specified times.

- *Find out about the usual system in your department, and the average length of time allocated for meetings.*

- *How do students know how to make an appointment?*

- *How easy is it to contact you from outside the University (especially important for those who are part-time, disabled or live some distance away)?*

- *Can students telephone your office, or do you prefer email? Giving students your home telephone number is not recommended, although some staff do so in special circumstances, such as for research supervision students.*

- *Could any aspect of your appointment system be improved (eg by booking in online and offering Teams meetings options)?*

Many new tutors start by trying to be accessible at all times, but then feel overwhelmed by constant interruptions and demands, so it is useful to explore these issues in advance.

- *What do you feel about saying "Not now" when someone says they need to see you urgently without an appointment?*

- *How can you tell when it is a real emergency?*

- *Do students feel they can only come to you if they have a problem?*

There are no simple answers, but it is worth thinking carefully about the advantages and disadvantages of a completely "Open Door" policy, on the one hand, or a very rigid appointment system on the other. You should also explore how your role and that of the Support and Wellbeing services interact.

It is important that students feel cared for as individuals but this should not undermine their autonomy and sense of personal responsibility (or indeed your own entitlement to a manageable workload).

- *Discuss these questions with some of your colleagues.*

- *Look again at your responses to the questions about expectations at the beginning of this guide.*

- *How do those answers relate to the issues raised here?*

13. Extensions and Mitigating Circumstances

If a student is experiencing a serious physical or mental illness, bereavement or any other situation which could have a substantial impact on all or some of their work, they may need to apply for an extension and/or submit a Mitigating Circumstances claim. In some circumstances an extension will be more beneficial for the student as there may be insufficient evidence to validate a claim for Mitigating Circumstances and the student will be developing a backlog of work to be submitted at the next assessment point.

13.1. Extensions

An **extension** is extra time to complete an assignment. The regulations for Undergraduates are:

At the discretion of the Programme Leader/Year Tutor, students may be permitted an extension. A formal record of the extension and the reason it was agreed must be kept. Extensions will not be granted for the submission of assignments beyond the date of the next Board of Examiners for the programme. As an Academic Adviser you may well be consulted but the decision rests with the Programme Leader/Year Tutor.

The Programme Leader/Year Tutor can determine the length of an extension at their discretion, but this should not exceed that which allows the mark to be submitted to the next Board of Examiners.

The student should discuss their needs for an extension with their Programme Leader/Year Tutor. The Programme Leader/Year Tutor might decline the request if the reason for non-completion of the work is not deemed sufficient. The Programme Leader/Year Tutor may alternatively recommend that an extension will not give the

student a reasonable chance of success and they should apply for mitigating circumstances. They might also provide an extension but additionally advise the student to apply for mitigating circumstances as a precaution.

13.2. Mitigating Circumstances

The Mitigating Circumstances procedure should not be invoked for trivial reasons, sometimes an assignment extension would be more appropriate. However, if something has seriously affected a student's performance, whether in a single examination or over a period of time, they should apply for mitigating circumstances - preferably after discussion with you or the Programme Leader/Year Tutor or other appropriate member of Academic staff.

Guides on how to apply and what is eligible as supporting evidence (including a downloadable FAQ booklet) can be found on the University web pages:

https://www.chi.ac.uk/about-us/policies-and-statements/academic-quality-and-standards/mitigating-circumstances

Students apply for Mitigating Circumstances through their ChiView for Students page. The online form is submitted to the Mitigating Circumstances Team in AQSS and will require supporting documentary evidence. A list of acceptable supporting evidence is given in the FAQ document and includes a medical certificate from their GP or letter from an authorised member of Student Support and Wellbeing such as a Wellbeing Mental Health Adviser or Nurse Health Adviser.

All claims are reviewed in advance of the Examination Board to decide if they are well-founded and the Board will only be informed of the decision itself so that the details are kept confidential. The Examination Board may take this decision into consideration when making judgments about progression. For further information on the process, seek advice from your Head of Department, Programme Leader or Year Tutor, and see the Academic Regulations - Section 1 - Part 11 (https://www.chi.ac.uk/about-us/policies-and-statements/academic-quality-and-standards).

14. Listening and other tutorial skills

Two of the most important skills you will need as an Academic Adviser are listening and questioning. Most Advisers and Counsellors recommend using open-ended questions to initiate discussion. *"How are you finding the different aspects of the programme?"* is usually more productive than *"Is* everything *OK?"* to which the student may feel obliged to answer *"yes"* and no more. Unless the student is obviously distressed, it is also useful to spend a few minutes together setting an informal agenda for the meeting – ask them what the key points are that they would like to cover, or use a standard format (e.g. progress since the last meeting, recent highlights, issues and queries, agreed action points).

It's equally important to allow students enough time to explore for themselves the issues that are raised, whether academic or personal, and to develop their own ideas about what to do. A common difficulty for Academic Advisers is the temptation to see oneself primarily as a source of information and advice. If so, you may jump in too soon and just tell the student what you think they should do. Instead try to avoid being too directive, attend closely to words and body language, and hold back your own comments or questions until they have had time to say what is on their mind.

After the student has finished speaking, you should repeat back the main points, to reassure them that you have been listening attentively and to enable them to correct any misunderstandings. Asking one or two questions can then open up the discussion and help them clarify the underlying issues.

For instance:

- *What aspects of the programme are working well/not working?*
- *What would you like to change/what can you do to improve things?*
- *Tell me how do you feel about what is happening?*
- *What are the options for you?*
- *Tell me more about….*
- *What would need to happen to make you feel better about…?*

(Some of these prompts are adapted from Wheeler and Birtle Chapter 3 'Counselling and Listening Skills' (Wheeler & Birtle, 1993). The chapter as a whole is full of practical examples and discussion of case studies and dilemmas.)

Towards the end of the discussion, it is helpful to agree jointly some realistic action points and, if appropriate, a time for a further meeting to follow up on progress.

Try to allow a few minutes immediately after each tutorial to make a note for yourself about how the session went and any ideas on how this could have been improved. It may even be possible - with advance permission - to record some tutorials. Both you and your students can benefit from this reminder of your discussions, and it will also help develop your awareness of tutorial dynamics.

You will probably have observed a wide range of teaching styles in lectures and seminars, but tutorial role models are usually more limited. It may be possible (with student permission), to sit in on a colleague's scheduled tutorial, or ask them to observe one of yours. This can broaden your experience and help you identify the kinds of tutorial contributions which seem most effective.

Another good way to explore different approaches to tutoring is for a group of colleagues to discuss anonymous case studies - which can bring out surprisingly different attitudes - to enable you to benefit from other people's experience.

15. Non-attendance at scheduled programme sessions or tutorials

15.1. Non-attendance at scheduled programme sessions

Student absence (particularly from two or more scheduled sessions) is viewed as a sign that a student may potentially be experiencing some difficulty. Your Department should have clear mechanisms for responding to student absence based on the Student Attendance, Engagement and Absence Policy. The responsibility for following up non-attendance has varied from Department to Department and in some cases lies with the Academic Advisers. If this is the case in your Department you should familiarise yourself with the procedures.

The SAM (Student Attendance Management) system produces more accurate registers of student attendance at timetabled sessions held face-to-face as well as indicating how many times the student has been absent which will facilitate decision making. On-line/remote sessions should also have attendance registers, and Moodle analytics on student engagement are being developed. However, your personal knowledge of the student is also an important factor in deciding at what level of non-attendance or non-engagement they should be followed up.

15.2. Non-attendance at tutorials

Whilst Academic Advisers should recognise and encourage students to be independent and in control of their learning, there is also a responsibility to ensure that non-attendance at tutorial meetings is followed up. The non-attendance could be due to forgetfulness or the student having the misconception that they only need to see their Academic Adviser 'if they have a problem'. There is always a real chance, however, that their absence is due to a more serious matter.

Your Department should have guidelines on monitoring attendance at tutorial sessions and how to handle non-attendance however, it is expected that all non-attendance should be followed up with the student. A date record should be kept of all attempts to contact the student which may include email, Teams, telephone and face to face contact.

If no response is forthcoming and there is reason for concern (eg where there is prior knowledge of issues or there is persistent non-attendance) you should discuss the matter with your Programme Lead or Head of Department and, if relevant, complete an online referral to Wellbeing services (using the Wellbeing Referral form for Staff). A record of actions agreed and taken should be kept.

16. Common concerns

In addition to improving your tutorial 'technique', it is helpful to think about the kinds of concerns that students are most likely to present so you can have some suggestions and contact details ready. Do not be afraid to seek additional support from the Student Support and Wellbeing team.

Student concerns fall into a number of basic categories:

16.1. Problems with academic work

Worries about programme choice
It is very common for new students to wonder if they are on the right programme. This may be related to other anxieties and will be overcome as they gradually settle down generally; you can help students best by enabling them to deal with the kinds of concerns outlined below. However, in some cases, it may be necessary for them to review their programme choice. Careers and Employability Service staff can be very helpful here in offering unbiased advice and a chance to talk through the issues. Contact details can be found on the staff intranet and Moodle and at the end of this guide.

Difficulties with particular modules
Try to encourage the student to discuss this with the module leader first; if they are reluctant to do so for any reason, talk through the issues with them, but be careful not to invite criticism of colleagues. Instead, help them to identify the underlying problem (e.g. inappropriate module choice, specific academic difficulty, personality clash with staff or students...) and to explore possible solutions for themselves, as this will help them to cope better in future.

Difficulties with general academic skills, such as writing essays or coping with examinations
Online advice and resources to support most aspects of University study are available through the University Study Skills pages on Moodle. This has details and timetables for the study skills workshops offered on both sites, which you could encourage your students to attend. Study Skills and other generic resources are intended to complement rather than replace programme-specific guidance on academic study which is often integrated into Level Four modules or the written advice in programme handbooks. However, the Academic Skills Adviser may be able to advise you on more tailored study workshops or the introduction of whole cohort delivery sessions to your programme (contact details on page 30).

Time management
This is another common problem, particularly during the first year. Students who have been used to reminders from parents or teachers at every stage of A-level or BTEC coursework can find it hard to

manage multiple deadlines on their own. Help them to draw up a sensible work-plan at the beginning of every Semester, but avoid taking on a 'parental' role or nagging them about this - they need to learn how to take responsibility for themselves. [The University Study Skills Moodle pages](#) also have advice on time management and organisation.

Problems with other students

These may arise from group projects, which can easily spark personality conflicts, or other areas where students work together such as in workshops and seminars. Try to avoid taking sides until you have a clear understanding of the issue. If perceived to be minor, help them to work towards a compromise. As with other transferable skills, the ability to work well with others requires practice and some support. You are welcome to seek advice from the Wellbeing team (see page 26) if you perceive the issue to be more complex or has its routes outside of the academic area or if you feel it is outside of your comfort zone.

Dyslexia or other specific learning difficulty

If you suspect this is the cause of academic difficulties, do encourage the student to contact the Disability and Dyslexia Service (DDS) for an expert assessment, as the student may be entitled to additional support and specialist tuition. See page 28 for more information about the service and for contact details.

In general:

- Think ahead about common study difficulties and the kind of advice that you might give in response.

- Check what programme-specific support is available and take a look at the [University Study Skills Moodle page](#) so you can advise students where to find relevant information and resources.

- Keep a note of any recurrent concerns, and consider building some subject-related 'study skills' development into first year modules, or running free-standing sessions with other academic colleagues.

16.2. Financial difficulties

These are increasingly common and can have a cumulative effect on students' work, with stress and anxiety often combining with too many hours of part-time employment causing academic under-achievement or failure.

Students with financial difficulties should be referred to the Student Money Team for relevant advice and possible assistance in the form of emergency loans or funds from the University Support Fund. The Student Money Team offers financial advice and specialist advice on welfare benefits and debt counselling as well as advice on student loans and budget planning. Student Money contact details can be found on page 28.

You have a role to offer a sympathetic ear, to encourage them to think about whether they could reduce some kinds of spending rather than working excessive hours to fund their lifestyle. Many first-year students really do find it hard to get a balance between study, work and fun at first, and may need a gentle reminder to focus priorities. The University recommends a maximum of 15 hours per week paid work during Semester time, but 10 is more realistic.

16.3. Personal problems

If you have built up a good relationship, it is quite natural that students will see you as their first port of call if they have any personal problems. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of the professional support offered by Student Support and Wellbeing services, other professional services and specialist agencies. Although you should expect to give advice on academic matters, do **not** attempt to take on the role of a personal counsellor.

When a student comes to you with a serious medical, mental health, financial or other personal problem, listen sensitively to what they are telling you, but **avoid the temptation to offer well-intentioned but non-specialist advice**. Instead use open questions to help the student clarify the issues in their own mind, and encourage them to contact the appropriate Student Support and Wellbeing service who will refer them to an appropriate specialist if necessary. You may even wish to show student how to access Student Support and Wellbeing services (the SIZ can also advise (ext. 6222)).

You can also use the [Wellbeing Referral form for Staff](#) to share your concerns with the Wellbeing team. This form is fast-tracked to the Wellbeing team and ensures they have the information needed to assess how best to follow the student up.

Please note Wellbeing Advisers are usually busy with appointments and cannot offer a drop-in service. If the concern is urgent please call for First Aid (01243 91)x**6363** or consider calling NHS 111 or for an ambulance.

See the section on 'Sources of specialist advice and support' on page 26 and keep the contact details easily available for reference in tutorials.

16.4. Complaints about a programme of study or a service provided by the University

If a student comes to you with a complaint about a programme of study, a University service, or a member of staff, you should advise them to discuss the matter with AQSS (acadvice@chi.ac.uk) as they manage the formal complaints procedure. Students can also seek advice or assistance from the Students' Union particularly if they are unsure how to complain, if they are unsure who to complain to, or need help in making their complaint. You should also direct the student to the Academic Regulations, Section 3 - Part 2: https://www.chi.ac.uk/about-us/policies-and-statements/academic-quality-and-standards.

There are three stages:

- Informal, where the student discusses the issue with the relevant member of staff.

- Formal, where the student writes a formal letter of complaint to the Head of the relevant Academic or Professional Department/Directorate.

- Appeal against a Stage Two decision, where a student dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage Two may appeal in writing to the appropriate member of the Vice-Chancellor's Group.

It is hoped that most complaints can be dealt with at the informal stage.

Confidentiality can be an issue and if you are unsure what to do in the given circumstances you can seek advice from your Head of Department, Programme Leader or Year Tutor, or from the Director of Students, Support and Information Systems or one of the Student Support and Wellbeing services.

17. Advice on difficult situations and referrals

You can use the [Wellbeing Referral form for Staff](#) even if you are unsure about whether they can help. They will be able to point you in the right direction and all information shared will be confidential within data protection guidelines.

The list of services available together with contact details can be found on page 26.

The following advice is based on Counselling Services guidelines for dealing with particularly difficult or disruptive situations:

- If someone is very upset or angry, try to stay calm yourself. Let them finish what they are saying so you can understand what it is they want. Ask them calmly to explain the bits you don't understand. Keep judgments to yourself.

- Acknowledge their emotion directly e.g. *'I can see how upset/ angry you are and I would like to try and help you'*

- Do not get angry yourself - their anger is not personal to you but will be an accumulation of events and pressures.

- If the student is very upset, offering them a cup of tea or coffee will also give you some extra time to decide the best way forward. Tell them about the services that you feel might help them and offer your telephone for them to make an appointment.

- Ask them to let you know later whether they got the help they needed, show your interest in helping them resolve their difficulties.

- If you don't have time to deal with the situation then it is better to say so - e.g. *'I understand what you want but I'm due in a lecture shortly and I want to make sure I give you the time you need - what time can you come back this afternoon?'*

- Ask the student if there is anything else they want from you.

- If you don't know how to help, be honest about that e.g. *'I understand what you want but I'm not sure who can provide that for you. Can you give me some time to make some calls to establish where you can get the help you need? I will keep your personal details confidential at this stage.'*

Think about how to introduce the suggestion that the student might speak to someone other than yourself. It is important that they don't feel you are just trying to offload them and their problems, but that you are genuinely concerned to ensure that they get the most appropriate support. Listen carefully before suggesting that a particular issue may be outside your own area of expertise and then do whatever you can to help them to make an appointment with someone who can help. Many Student Support and Wellbeing appointments for students are made via SIZ (ext. 6222), but appointments can also be made by emailing direct.

It is usually best not to make this initial contact on the student's behalf, and certainly not without their permission. Counselling services suggest that in 80% of cases where someone else has made the appointment, the student will fail to attend. However, if you are worried that they may avoid seeking the necessary professional help and the matter seems urgent, offer the appropriate contact details so they can make initial contact immediately (or as soon as possible). You can use the Wellbeing Referral form for Staff to let Wellbeing services know (this does allow a limited sharing of concern where permission has not been sought).

Do not expect to receive any feedback about the outcome of a referral. Other professionals are bound by confidentiality rules just as you are. However, check that the student is aware of this, in case they are anxious about privacy. Alternatively, they may prefer you to know what is happening and automatically assume that you will be kept up to date by other people. This is not the case, so ask the student to let you know how they get on and to come back to you if there are any problems or delays. This will reassure them that you are not trying to ignore their difficulties, but are genuinely concerned to make sure they get the appropriate support from a qualified professional.

You should familiarise yourself with the areas covered by Student Support and Wellbeing (outline details in the next section). It is also helpful to discuss with colleagues the boundaries between your own role and that of Support and Wellbeing services. You might also use hypothetical case studies to explore your responses to a range of issues and to consider where and when a specialist referral would be the most appropriate action.

If you have any questions regarding Student Support and Wellbeing services please contact stusupport@chi.ac.uk. The Directorate is also able to arrange a student-facing introductory talk about the services available, and staff training if there is a group of staff in your department who would benefit. Please contact the service for more details. Such training is in partnership with Staff Development and includes topics such as Mental Health, Suicide Prevention, Sexual Assault, Academic Adviser Training, Retention and Engagement and Safeguarding and Prevent training.

18. Sources of specialist advice and support

18.1. Student Support and Wellbeing Services

The services listed here are described in greater detail in the following paragraphs:

Wellbeing Services   https://wellbeing.chi.ac.uk/
                                        Wellbeing referral form for staff
                                        wellbeing@chi.ac.uk

Student Health Service
01243 816111 - 07739 983703   studenthealth@chi.ac.uk

Disability and Dyslexia Service
01243 812076   disability@chi.ac.uk / dyslexia@chi.ac.uk

Student Money Service
01243 816038   studentmoney@chi.ac.uk

International Advice
01243 812146   international@chi.ac.uk

Wellbeing Services

Our Wellbeing web pages (https://wellbeing.chi.ac.uk/) provides lots of information about the services offered by the Wellbeing Team including the drop-in timetable, how students can book triage appointments, self-help guides and Togetherall (which includes out-of-hours support).

The team provide daily, term-time, online triage appointments offering a confidential space to talk through any worries or concerns with a professional Wellbeing Adviser. Advice includes signposting and access to a range of services including Mental Health, Counselling, Wellbeing Mentoring, Walk and Talk, and a range of different of intervention groups and much more.

It is always preferable for students to contact the service for themselves and book their own appointment but members of staff may refer students to the service using the [Wellbeing referral form for staff](#). This ensures the key information is fast-tracked to the Wellbeing team (the team receive an overwhelming number of emails each day so referrals by email are not accepted as they may not be picked up in time).

Please note that the team does not operate an emergency service. If you believe the student is at immediate risk call the University emergency number 01243 81**6363** and/or call 999 for emergency services.

Our Professional Wellbeing Team includes:

- Qualified Mental Health Advisers - offering advice, signposting and skills intervention training to students with diagnosed mental health conditions as well as those experiencing problems such as stress, low mood, anxiety and difficulty coping.

- Student Wellbeing Advisers - offering a friendly, helpful and confidential service for all students with concerns regarding friends, family or other students.

- Wellbeing Counsellors - offering the opportunity to talk through personal problems and difficulties with a qualified and registered counsellor.

Student Health

Our Nurse Health Advisers are part of our Health and Wellbeing Service and provide an approachable and confidential service with daily clinics. They work closely with local NHS services and offer support and guidance on all aspects of health and wellbeing including supporting students with GP registration, sexual health issues, and management of medication. For students with chronic health conditions, such as epilepsy and diabetes, individual support plans can be formulated with the student to ensure they are safe and supported whilst at university.

Contact details can be found on page 26.

Disability and Dyslexia Service (DDS)

The Disability and Dyslexia Service provides a range of support services to students with disabilities, continuing health conditions, mental health conditions, specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia etc.) and any additional learning need that requires any sort of support or adjustment in teaching, learning and exams. The team recommend suitable reasonable adjustments which are documented and shared with academic departments in the form of SARAs (Student Additional Requirements Agreement) and RAWEs (Reasonable Adjustments for Work Experience).

The team can also arrange for qualified note-takers, readers, communicators, signers and non-medical helpers/mentors - who are all normally funded from the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA).

They can also advise the accommodation team if a student needs a particular type of room in halls because of a disability or medical condition.

Student Money Team

The Student Money Advisers assist with queries about student loans and other sources of funding, including how and when to apply for funding and dealing with associated problems. They administer the University Support Fund (which provides grants to students in financial need) and the emergency loan facility, and offer advice on budget planning and how to manage financial difficulties.

International Advice

The International Advisers offer a wide range of support and advice for international (including EU) students including: banking, culture shock, driving in the UK, emergency loans, employment and work permits, equal opportunities, exam concessions, fees and funding, health cover, immigration advice, local facilities, National Insurance numbers, places to visit, police registration, rules and regulations affecting international students, the Host UK programme, trips to UK destinations etc.

18.2. Other Professional Department Services

Accommodation Team

Help and advice on accommodation issues both for students in Halls and for students in private sector housing. The Moodle page has contact details and links to private sector housing sites for students seeking housing for their second and third years: https://moodle.chi.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=70251

The Accommodation webpages are also very helpful: https://www.chi.ac.uk/student-life/accommodation

Accommodation 24/7 contacts:

BOC 01243 793477
BRC.......................................01243 793488
Stockbridge.............................01243 533356 / 07824 349543
Fishbourne ....01243 790279 / 07791 692966
Westgate .... 01243 812931 / 07795 257068
accommodation@chi.ac.uk

Careers and Employability Service

Supports students at all stages of their programme and after Graduation with a range of information, advice and guidance including advice on changing course as well as on writing CVs and making job applications. A drop-in service is provided and there is an online careers an jobs board including placements, part-time work and graduate opportunities: https://careers.chi.ac.uk

01243 816035   **careers@chi.ac.uk**   **@ChiUniCareers**

Chaplaincy

The University Chaplain is Rev. Dr. Alison Green, who offers confidential, non-judgmental and compassionate advice.

01243 816041   **Alison.Green@chi.ac.uk**

Skills Team

The Skills Team offers support, advice, and training for students and staff on a number of topics, covering; IT skills, study skills, creative skills, and learning technologies.

They are available to support in a variety of different ways, including one-to-one, group workshops and online training.

You can request support at the SIZ, or contact the IT Skills Team:

01243 793535   **ITSkills@chi.ac.uk**

Academic Skills Adviser

The Academic Skills Adviser offers workshops and one-to-one advice appointments focusing on the important skills needed to be successful in studies including: essay planning and structuring; academic writing; referencing; time management; critical thinking; exam and revision techniques.

01243 816040   **Alison.Wright@chi.ac.uk**

The University of Chichester Students' Union (UCSU)

Advice and representation, particularly in relation to student disciplinary procedures, complaints and appeals. Visit https://www.ucsu.org/ for further information or email:

studentsunion@chi.ac.uk

19. Bibliography

Wheeler, S., & Birtle, J. (1993). *A Handbook for Personal Tutors.* Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.