STUDENT SUPPORT CODE OF PRACTICE

Note about this Code of Practice
- This document sets out the School's overall approach to providing academic and pastoral support for students.
- The current version is specifically focused on practice for face-to-face MSc Programmes. It is intended to update this Code of Practice in due course to be applicable for all types of provision, across both London-based and distance learning programmes including Masters degrees, modules, award-bearing Diploma and Certificate programmes, non-award-bearing short courses, and research degrees.

Related documentation
- Staff should make themselves aware of other relevant LSHTM Codes of Practice, policies and procedures – particularly the Orientation and Induction Code of Practice, and the Teachers' handbook.

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POLICY

Principles

1.   The School recognises the need for ongoing support for each student, both for pastoral care and academic guidance. Specifically for MSc students:

    (i)   Each student should have a personal tutor. Tutors cover primarily general academic advice and pastoral guidance and must be approved by the MSc Programme Director and the Faculty Taught Programme Director.

(ii)   The role of the tutor is defined at School level. If Faculty or Programme arrangements differ from the School norm, a separate Code of Practice must be prepared and agreed at Faculty and School level, and announced to staff and students.

(iii)   Tutors should be aware of the needs of students and should be accessible to them. They should either be members of the relevant Programme Committee, or should make themselves aware of the actions of the Programme Committee and should be prepared to act appropriately on matters discussed there.

(iv)   In addition to the personal tutor system, other forms of academic and pastoral support are made available.

Aims of student support

2.   The School aims to provide two kinds of student support – academic guidance and pastoral care.

Objectives of student support

3.   The objectives of student support are to:
(i)   Provide general academic and pastoral support through the personal tutor system.
(ii)   Provide specific academic support, where this is required, through access to subject staff.
(iii)   Facilitate access, where this is required, to specific pastoral and other support systems, for example the Student Advisers, the Careers Service, support for enhancing English language skills, etc.

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Role of personal tutor

4.   The role of the personal tutor is considered to be particularly important in a system which is primarily module-based. Students following the same MSc may take a variety of modules and the MSc 'class' may rarely meet together, possibly leading to a lessening of Programme identity and a reduction in group support mechanisms. Specifically, the personal tutor:
- acts as the first point of contact over any matter of concern and establishes a good relationship with the student;
- assists with orientation to life and study in the UK, explains the School's academic expectations and clarifies assessment arrangements;
- helps in setting academic and professional goals and advises on study choices;
- monitors the progress of the student and guides them towards appropriate remedial help, and
- assists with the development of study skills, writing and other communication skills, and gives general academic guidance.

5.   It is particularly important in a predominantly module-based system that tutors provide guidance for tutees on their choice of modules, taking into account the objectives of the individual tutee and the options available for that MSc. Tutors should be familiar with the sections of the MSc Programme Handbook relevant to their tutee's MSc.

6.	The personal tutor should be available for consultation on assignments and assessments and should advise on study skills related to these assignments. However, it must be emphasised that responsibility for completing assessed work is entirely the students' responsibility. Tutors may give general advice on how to approach an assessment task. Once it is prepared, they may comment on the clarity of presentation but are not permitted to make substantial academic input, such as detailed editing of essays or practical assignments.

7.	The tutor plays a trouble-shooting role, reporting any academic or non-academic problems to the MSc Programme Director. Language problems likely to impede learning should be reported at an early stage. Tutors should also refer the student to other resources (including other staff) which can help meet needs and expectations. Where academic problems are identified with which the tutor cannot help, the tutor should facilitate remedial support, including approaching other staff on behalf of the tutee. Where personal, medical or other problems are identified, the tutee should be referred to appropriate sources of help, after consultation with the MSc Programme Director and/or the Registry and/or the Student Advisers.

8.	It is the personal tutor's responsibility to keep up-to-date on changes in the MSc Programme, on educational practice on the Programme and in the Faculty, and should be prepared to act appropriately on matters decided by the Programme Committee. They should ensure their tutees are aware of developments or changes to the Programme.

9.	As members of their Faculty community, tutors may be assigned further responsibilities that are not directly linked to their individual tutees – including that tutors will normally be expected to be markers for Programmes and modules that they or their students are associated with, and may also be asked to mark on others.

10.	In the event of a breakdown in the tutor/tutee relationship, either party may request a change following discussion with the MSc Programme Director or Taught Programme Director.

Frequency of tutorials

11.	All students have a right to see their tutor individually, where necessary. Personal tutors should be accessible to tutees and maintain regular contact with them, whether or not specific problems have been identified. The frequency of these meetings should be agreed between the tutor and tutee. In general, each student should have the option of seeing their tutor once a fortnight in term one, and at least once every three weeks in term time thereafter. Tutees should be spread among staff so that these arrangements can be achieved.

12.	When a tutor will be absent for more than two weeks in term time they should organise a replacement, and this should be clearly agreed with the replacement and the tutee, and recorded with the Programme Administrator and/or the MSc Programme Director in advance of the absence.

Part-time students

13.   For tutoring, part-time students should be regarded as one whole tutee since experience suggests that one part-time student needs about the same amount of support in any one year as one full-time student. Tutors need to be aware of the issues that are pertinent to part-time students.

Other academic support

14.   Student academic needs and expectations differ so other support mechanisms are required to supplement the tutorial system, for example, individual or group remedial teaching, revision classes for written examinations, and study skills sessions. Students sometimes need backup discussion or remedial support in a particular module and the staff associated with that module should endeavour to accommodate these needs.

15.   One of the channels via which such support can be provided is the 'Personalised Additional Study Skills' (PASS) programme, in section 23.

Project supervision

16.   Students can expect to receive guidance from their personal tutor on how to identify an appropriate project topic and supervisor (when this is not due to be the personal tutor).

Other student support

17.   Peer support mechanisms should be facilitated and encouraged by the MSc Programme Director to strengthen links between students following the same programme, for the purposes of both academic and personal support.

18.   Staff should be aware of the range of other support services available to students such as the Student Advisers, Student Counsellors, Careers Office, local health services etc. Staff who may not be fully aware of the range of support services available to students are encouraged to attend the presentations arranged for students by the Student Adviser during International Students' Welcome or Orientation week. On request, the Student Adviser may also be in a position to speak to groups of staff about the various channels of support available for students.

19.   Tutors should also be aware of the most appropriate steps to take to assist any students experiencing non-academic 'crisis' problems e.g. financial hardship (consult the Student Adviser) or visa problems for international students (these should always be referred to the Student Advisers; tutors must not contact the Home Office direct).

Monitoring of student progress

20.   MSc Programme Directors, tutors and subject staff should liaise concerning students who have problems and should seek to address problems before they become too great. Such discussions should always occur where students fail coursework assessment, and often if several passes are only at the satisfactory level.

21.   To monitor progress and needs, MSc Programme Directors should meet with Programme Representatives regularly and with the whole class periodically. If the MSc Programme Director is absent at any time during term time, their role should be assigned to a member of the Programme Committee who is present, and the students should be informed in advance.

Personalised Additional Study Skills (PASS) Programme

22.   The School provides an extensive programme of study skills support for taught programme students, including the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme which runs for much of the year. However, for a small number of students some additional individualised study skills support may be necessary. The Personalised Additional Study Skills (PASS) programme is intended to address such needs. Further information can be found on the website here: http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/edu/taughtcourses/staffresources/index.html

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LSHTM Student Support Code of Practice
Approved by the Associate Dean of Studies, April 2013. Minor updates by John Peck, March 2017.