



University of Essex

SUPPORTING STUDENTS



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The University of Essex is committed to developing and enhancing provision of support for our students. We strive to provide an environment in which students can thrive, achieve their potential and succeed. Students often face challenges during their time at Essex and as a member of staff you can play a role in helping students to overcome these challenges, whether directly or through referral to other specialist support.

This guide is for any staff member (including graduate assistants and student staff/volunteers) who may encounter or be approached by students in need of support.

Further information and resources can be found under 'Supporting Students' on the staff webpages: www.essex.ac.uk/staff

Aletta Norval
Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education

“[Students] feeling that staff are approachable, that they know who/where to go if they are having problems with coursework, and that there is someone that they can go to if they have a problem also impacts on their attitudes, expectations and sense of belonging.”

Cashmore, Scott and Cane 2012

“The department have been extremely helpful and empathetic towards my situation. I am very happy with their help.”

Third year undergraduate student,
Biological Sciences

“My tutor has been very kind and helpful, taking my concerns seriously and referring me to the right people.”

First year undergraduate student,
Essex Business School

EFFECTIVE SUPPORT

Being reliable, available and approachable are key features for supporting students. Personal contact with staff helps students to feel a connection to the University and gives opportunities to encourage attendance, promote academic success and to signpost support.

What you can do:

- Listen
- Ask open questions
- Find out how the student is doing and find out a bit more about them. An informal chat at the start of the meeting can help establish rapport and trust
- Tell them a bit about your interests (just briefly!!)
- Don't be afraid of tears
- Make appropriate referrals
- Give the student time to talk
- Be sympathetic and not dismissive

What you can't do:

- Solve all of a student's problems
- Take responsibility for his or her emotional state or actions
- Force the student to get help if they don't want it
- Act as the student's counsellor

Do feel free to ask Student Support and your Senior Personal Tutor for advice and support for yourself when supporting students.

REFERRALS AND ADVICE

Most students you see will probably want to discuss situations that relate to their studies or future career options. Most of the time you will be able to help them. However, some students may come to you with more complicated problems. If the issues they raise are outside of your area of expertise, you should advise the student to consult one of the University's dedicated support services: (<http://www.essex.ac.uk/students/health-and-wellbeing/documents/fold-out-guide-colchester.pdf> and <http://www.essex.ac.uk/students/health-and-wellbeing/documents/fold-out-guide-southend.pdf>)

Explain why you feel the student would benefit from talking to someone else and then encourage them to contact the service.

Sometimes a student is not prepared to talk to or seek help from a specialist service. Unless they are 'at risk', you can only make your concern known to the student, confirm this by e-mail and try to keep the line of communication with them open.

Academic Skills Support

Personal Tutors' responsibilities include providing academic support to their tutees to promote academic success, including responding to queries or concerns they might have about their course work, assignments they need to complete and academic offences. If you feel that

SUPPORTING STUDENTS

some students need extra support, you can direct them towards the Talent Development Centre services, which include 1:1 advising and small group workshops on all aspects of study skills, as well as Academic English Support classes for those with English as an additional language: (www.essex.ac.uk/students/study-resources/tdc/default.aspx)

Students at risk

Very occasionally a student may exhibit or refer to disturbing behaviour or thoughts which lead you to believe that they may be at risk of harm to themselves or others and that there is a need for urgent intervention. You may be concerned because the student:

- Is expressing thoughts of serious self-harm or suicide
- Is violent, or threatening violence to people or property
- Seems very disorientated and out of touch with reality, including, having hallucinations, hearing voices or expressing paranoid or irrational beliefs

If you are concerned that a student is at risk, please contact the Wellbeing team in Student Support without delay by e-mailing wellbeing@essex.ac.uk or phoning 01206 873133. Alternatively, you can complete a 'Reporting a Concern' form which can be found here: www.essex.ac.uk/students/contact/report-concern.aspx. You should also let your Senior Tutor know. Out of office hours, members of the Residence Life team can provide

advice and follow up with students living in campus accommodation if necessary. Security staff hold the on-call rota for the team and should be contacted in the first instance with any concerns.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Mental health problems are common and many students will experience emotional and psychological difficulties at some point during their studies. Usually these can be resolved by talking things through with family or friends and most students, including those with diagnosed mental health difficulties, will cope with reasonable support (including professional support if need be), and are able to succeed at university.

Supporting distressed students

Sometimes distressed students will turn to staff for help or support. If you feel you need, or are requested, to give a student extra assistance it is important to help within the boundaries of your role and what you feel competent to do.

It is not always easy to decide what the best source of support might be. What is important in the first instance is to refer the student to somewhere that is acceptable to him or her. If in doubt, the Student Services Hub is always a good place to start.

If you offer support yourself, make sure you have sufficient time within the context of your other commitments to do this and

it does not conflict with other aspects of your role. Avoid making physical contact as this can be misconstrued. Trust your instincts - if you feel a student may be at risk, contact the Wellbeing Service by emailing wellbeing@essex.ac.uk or phoning 01206 873133.

Sometimes you will be made aware of worrying behaviour, by other students for example. Or you may notice a student appears physically unwell, dishevelled, agitated or acting out of character. In this case, follow up with the student if you feel confident to do so – it is important to be honest with the student about the concerns and be prepared to refer to other sources of support. If you remain concerned, or you do not have the capacity to follow up with the student yourself, please pass on the concerns to your Senior Tutor as well as to the Wellbeing service in Student Support who can follow up as necessary.

DISABILITY, DYSLEXIA AND ACCESSIBILITY

In 2015/16 there were over 900 students registered with the disability services at Essex and not all students choose to disclose. If a student discloses a disability to you, always ask the student if the University's disability service is aware and encourage them to make contact with disability services for specialist advice, support and information. Be aware that disabilities are not always 'visible'. We would encourage you to think about inclusive teaching styles which benefit all

students including those with difficulties. No two disabled students experience the same combination of difficulties, but for general guidance on particular disabilities and the difficulties they are likely to cause visit the University website: https://www.essex.ac.uk/staff/student_support/disability.aspx

In addition to supporting students with disabilities, we can provide support to students who have long term medical needs, are care leavers, are studying part-time, are mature (i.e. over 21 when they started their undergraduate course or over 25 when they started their postgraduate course) or have caring responsibilities.

EXPECTATIONS

Establish expectations at the beginning; both your's and your students'!

What can be expected of you?

- You take an interest in your students and their activities
- Within reason, you accommodate your students' requests for meetings
- You treat the information students share as confidential, unless absolutely necessary
- You have an appreciation of equality and diversity matters
- You make yourself aware of support services available to students so that you can make appropriate referrals
- You are not expected to have specialist pastoral support skills
- You are not expected to offer counselling, specialist advice or ongoing emotional support.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS

Expectations include:

- When you are and are not available
- How long meetings will last
- The best way to arrange a meeting
- How quickly you will respond to email
- What you can offer and what is offered centrally

What can you expect?

- Students to attend scheduled meetings (and give notice if they won't be attending)
- Students to contact you if they need meetings beyond scheduled departmental provision
- Students to ask questions you can easily answer and others that will require you to direct them towards specialist services

CONFIDENTIALITY

You are in a position of trust and your discussions with your students should be treated as confidential. Confidentiality is not secrecy, and some confidential issues will need to be shared with other named contacts and/or specialist services. If you feel a student may be at risk, let Student Support know. If you are unsure about whether an issue should be kept confidential, or would like further advice on an issue, you can seek guidance from Student Support or your senior tutor anonymously in the first instance. All appropriate written records should be stored securely and out of plain sight of other people. As a Departmental Disability Liaison Officer (DDLO), for example,

you may wish to send an information email to a number of students. Please ensure that you use the 'bcc' facility available in Outlook or send each email separately. Any contact with students should be individual and the recipient should not have access to the names of other disabled students. Some support services (such as disability and wellbeing services) can only pass on information after a student has given signed consent and agreed who they would like their information shared with.



In the unlikely event of a crisis where a student – or those around – are at immediate risk, the police or ambulance should be called (via security at your campus).

SAFEGUARDING (Students under 18 and adults at risk)

Every year, the University has a few students who are under 18 when they start their course and because of their age, we have an enhanced duty of care to them. We also have adults who would be regarded as at risk: for example, an adult may be considered vulnerable because

they need extra support or special care. All staff working with students under 18 or an adult at risk, should be aware that any concerns, however minor, should be raised with the Safeguarding team (safeguard@essex.ac.uk) or in their absence, a Designated Safeguarding Officer. In the event of a serious problem, Student Support holds contact details for next of kin, including nominated emergency contacts for international students.

The Personal Tutor of students under 18 will need to make contact with them close to the start of term and maintain regular contact until they reach 18. The Personal Tutor should also ensure they are familiar with our Policy on Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk: www.essex.ac.uk/staff/student_support/documents/safeguarding-policy.pdf

Safeguarding guidance and training support is also available: www.essex.ac.uk/staff/student_support/safeguarding/default.aspx

THINKING OF LEAVING

It is quite common for students to think about leaving at some stage in their studies. Often the student just needs the space to think through their situation and ultimately they decide to continue. If a student is considering leaving there is a resource for staff advising students: www.essex.ac.uk/staff/student_support/restricted/students-unsure-studies.pdf

ROLES

The following roles offer specific support within the department.

Personal Tutor

Our Personal Tutor system has been designed to enhance students' experience at Essex by providing a structure to support them in their academic journey. At Essex all undergraduate and taught postgraduate students are allocated a Personal Tutor. Although research students are not allocated a Personal Tutor, supervisors are likely to be a main departmental contact for research students. Students can see the name of their Personal Tutor by logging in to MyEssex.

Personal Tutors provide general and academic support to a small group of students, offering opportunities to discuss their academic progress, their transition between years and their progression into the world beyond the University.

You will work with your department to provide your tutees with essential information and when necessary referral to specialist central support. All Personal Tutors are supported by a Senior Tutor who you can contact for further advice, information and training.

Attendance meetings

Personal tutors and other staff may need to have attendance meetings with some of their students. The aim of the attendance

SUPPORTING STUDENTS

meeting is to identify what can be done to help students attend, submit their work and progress in their studies. Your role is to help your tutees to identify reasons for not fully engaging with their studies and then identify ways to overcome them and to identify the support available to help them to progress. It is important to establish a shared understanding of their current progress and help the tutees to reflect on why they might not be fully engaging with their studies. It is not important to press for reasons or for your tutees to give details. Your role is not to judge the reasons they provide but it is important to help them establish ownership by identifying possible solutions and the support available. Tutees on a Tier 4 visa should be reminded of their requirements. There is more detailed guidance for attendance meetings in the Appendix at the end of this guide.

Your role involves:

- Advising your tutees and referring them to specialist support services when appropriate
- Maintaining regular contact with your tutees (at least three times per year)
- Writing personal references for tutees seeking further academic study or employment
- Holding attendance meetings with tutees where appropriate
- Keeping brief notes of meetings which have been agreed with the student

Senior Tutor

Senior Tutors are responsible for monitoring and coordinating the delivery of their department's Personal Tutor system. They provide backup to Personal Tutors, oversee peer mentoring arrangements, liaise with the mentoring scheme co-ordinator and act as a link between your department and support services. Senior Tutors will also act as the under-18s coordinator for the department and respond to requests from students to change their Personal Tutor. Contact your Senior Tutor for information and advice.

Senior Tutors are all members of an email group snr-tutors@essex.ac.uk which can be used to ask questions or seek peer support.

Departmental Disability Liaison Officer (DDLO)

Your role is as a link between Support Services, your academic department and students with additional support requirements due to a disability, medical condition or mental health issues, to ensure we meet our obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

Contact details for each DDLO can be found on the University website <https://www.essex.ac.uk/students/disability/liaison-officers.aspx>

Departmental Peer Mentor Co-ordinator

A peer mentor co-ordinator is a staff member responsible for overseeing undergraduate peer mentoring arrangements within your department, school or centre.

Information about peer mentoring, including scheme coordinator contact details can be found www.essex.ac.uk/students/study-resources/mentoring/default.aspx

Other roles

Other staff involved with supporting students in departments include:

- Study Abroad Officer
- Placement Officer
- Professional Services Team staff

MENTORING

Mentoring is a relationship usually between a new student (the mentee) and a more experienced student (the mentor) to help the new student settle in, and make them aware of ways they can get involved and make the most of their university experience. There are many mentoring schemes available, including undergraduate peer mentoring and the postgraduate mentoring scheme. For information on all the schemes, visit: www.essex.ac.uk/students/study-resources/mentoring

TRAINING AND FURTHER RESOURCES

Training dates for staff supporting students are listed here: www.essex.ac.uk/staff/student_support/default.aspx

Further resources, including campus specific guides to support services, advising students who are unsure about continuing their studies and specific resources for Personal Tutors are available on the same page.



SUPPORTING STUDENTS

APPENDIX : GOOD PRACTICE FOR ATTENDANCE MEETINGS

We have been asked to provide some guidance for attendance meetings following their introduction in 2015. Here are 9 top tips that are working well in departments:

- 1 Welcome the student.** They may be feeling defensive and unsettled about being invited to the meeting.
- 2 Explain the purpose of the meeting.** For example, "As you know, you've been asked to meet about your academic progress."
- 3 Establish a shared understanding of their current progress.** Personal Tutors can view their students' attendance on SharePoint, and students can view their grades via FASER. [Staff members may also be able to view these through MyTutor/S2S and throughout 2017/18 students will be able to view attendance via MyEssex.]
For example, " Let's take a look at your attendance and grades."
- 4 Help them to reflect on why they might not be fully engaging with their studies.**
"What do you think might be the reasons why you've not been attending/not submitting coursework/not performing as well as you might?"
You don't have to press them for details. Your tutees may not tell you their reasons. Alternatively, they may start to tell you more than they need to. You can help them to move on by: acknowledging their situation and saying "you don't have to give me all the detail. What do you think we could do to help you?"
- 5 Identify the positives of their situation.**
For instance, if they are commuting and caring for others, discuss the positives of their time management.
- 6 If they are on a Tier 4 visa, remind them of their requirements.**
"As you are aware, as you are on a Tier 4 visa, you are being sponsored by the University to be here in the UK. Therefore, there are formal consequences of you not attending. Let's now discuss how you can meet those requirements."

7 Help them to establish ownership by helping them to identify possible solutions and the support available.

Your role is not to judge the reasons that they provide. Nor are you required to make them promise to attend.

Questions to ask to help them identify ways forward:

“What steps do you think you need to take?”; “What can we do to help?”

You can use “Your Guide to Personal Tutor and Support Services” (fold-out) when referring them.

Examples:

Sometimes students who have been diagnosed with a disability, including a learning difficulty don't always access the specialist support available. Remind them of the confidential support available. <https://www1.essex.ac.uk/students/disability/default.aspx>

If they say that they don't find the lectures/class useful, ask “When you attend those sessions, how could you make that time in the lecture/class/seminar work for you?”

Discuss strategies.

“What do you think it would take for you to attend?”

Sometimes students don't attend because they are worried about being asked to speak up in class when they haven't understood the reading. Discuss strategies to help them prepare so that they can be ready.

Extenuating circumstances –

Where relevant, make them aware of the extenuating circumstances and late submission process.

8

To finish: Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about?

9

Email the student (or record on MyTutor/S2S) an agreed summary of the conversation.

“How shall we summarise what we've discussed?”

