



PERSONAL TUTORING AND STUDENTS AT RISK POLICY:

1. INTRODUCTION

Personal tutoring is the activity designed to “*improve the intellectual and academic ability and nurture the emotional well-being of learners through individualised, holistic support.*” (Stork and Walker 2015, p.9)

At the heart of the activity is a partnership of trust between tutor and student and the wider university community, providing an environment in which the individual is recognised and enabled to thrive as they grow in awareness and take responsibility as a life-long learner. Personal tutors are not counsellors nor have all the answers but can coach students to identify the challenges they face and affirming them as they discover the answers and solutions, signposting and referring to appropriate support services, where needed. Resources to support personal tutors in their role are available on the [Personal Tutor Hub \(SMILE\)](#).

Personal tutoring helps to establish a firm foundation for students to flourish, getting the most out of their time at university and enhancing their future potential. Personal Tutors help to ‘pave the way forward’ by supporting students in four main areas (PAVE):

- **Pastoral** – Providing pastoral support, encouraging participation and engagement in university life, celebrating successes and signposting to appropriate support services when necessary.
- **Academic** – Empowering students to facilitate their own academic progress and signposting to appropriate support services when necessary.
- **Vocation** – Encouraging students to consider potential mentoring and career opportunities, identify steps for career progression and set goals in collaboration with Employability Services.
- **Environment** – Upholding St Mary’s values of inclusiveness, respect, excellence and generosity of spirit to build a sense of belonging within the student’s programme and the wider university community.

Personal Tutors are also crucial in enabling us to identify at an early stage when students are facing challenges or are not engaging with their programmes, so that the issues can be understood and appropriate support can be provided.

1.1 Purpose

St Mary’s University is proud of its reputation as a close and supportive community. In recent NSS surveys over 89% of our students report that they are highly satisfied with the academic support they receive from their programme. This is achieved through our high standards of academic and pastoral support.

This policy sets out the principles, expectations and guidance for personal tutoring at St Mary’s University. It recognises that personal tutoring (PT) is fundamental to the student experience and as such is initiated at the subject level. Engaging successfully with tutoring and reporting processes also enables us to ensure that we have institutional oversight of the student experience and can maintain equity for all.

The policy is designed to set out overarching guidance and standards, seeking not to be overly prescriptive, but to maximise local expertise and reaffirm best practice evident across the university.

1.2 Scope

The Personal Tutoring Policy is for staff, undergraduate, and postgraduate taught students at St. Mary's University. This includes St. Mary's students taught off-campus (for example, at off-site centres or online); while practices may not be identical across all our franchised partnership collaborations, appropriate PT provision for students at partner institutions is agreed upon as part of the partnership arrangement, and outlined in the operations manual for franchised partnerships.

Where Joint Honours programmes exist, the relevant academic schools should clearly identify how personal tutoring will apply to those students, complying with the Personal Tutoring Model / Procedure.

2. POLICY

2.1 Definition of terms

- **Principles** express values and intentions in broad terms that outline the overall approach to personal tutoring.
- **Expectations** specify clear base line actions which promote best practice.
- **Guidance** describes advice and recommendations on how the policy, principles and best practices will be implemented over time.

2.2 Principles

The approach to personal tutoring at St Mary's is based on six principles for personal tutoring:

A. Partnership

Personal tutoring involves partnership and collaboration between the student and the tutor and agreeing mutual expectations and goals together. This provides a personalised system of engagement in which student progression is regularly monitored and supported.

B. Flexibility

The format and mode of meetings can be mutually arranged and where possible will accommodate students' diverse needs, for example those on placement or with caring responsibilities. Tutorials can be 1:1 meetings or group tutorials or a mixture of both, as the PT deems appropriate and necessary. The mode of meetings can be remote (telephone or video call) or face to face.

C. Equity

There should be parity of access to tutoring for all students across all years of study and across all taught programmes. In practice, whilst the model of personal tutoring may look different across the institution and some students may require more guidance than others, the core principles and expectations of personal tutoring should be the same. See the section on Expectations for further clarification.

D. Purposeful planning

The personal tutoring process requires student engagement in a purposeful and planned programme of meaningful activities which contribute to the student's academic, personal and professional development. The range of contact points offered should reflect the varying student experience or need at different points in their academic journey.

E. Informed engagement

The use of information and data about student engagement (e.g. attendance, use of learning resources, assessment completion, and success) helps to provide tailored interactions for the student's academic journey. Personal tutors will also support the student's experience at the wider university level by adding information to the student engagement platform (STEP) and reporting any relevant information regarding students at risk through the programme / school management structure in line with data protection guidelines.

F. Training and development of tutors

Recognising personal tutoring's status as a 'relational pedagogy' which cultivates positive relationships at the heart of teaching (Bovill 2020), ongoing training and support of personal tutors makes an important contribution to the efficacy of personal tutoring. It helps to elevate its place within the curriculum as well as helping to improve confidence and competency amongst staff. Appropriate workload allocations will be included in the academic planning model, to enable staff both to fulfil their PT responsibilities and maintain and develop their practice.

2.3 Expectations

Clear expectations promote best practice in personal tutoring, whilst ensuring the principles of flexibility and equity are maintained across the university:

<i>Allocation of a personal tutor</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each student will have a named Personal Tutor. • The allocation of students to Personal Tutors will be agreed at School level.
<i>Design of personal tutoring model</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The model of personal tutoring will be designed and agreed at the 'local' level (i.e. School), so that it will be individualised and appropriate for different programme requirements and experiences. • The model will meet student need and align with this policy, its principles and procedures. • The model will specify key features of the School's approach to PT including frequency of meetings, use of group/individual tutorials and relevant topics for tutorials. • Each School's model will be made available to students and staff on relevant Moodle programme pages
<i>Senior Tutor role</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each School will have a Senior Tutor(s) who will be responsible for design and delivery of the local personal tutoring model (above); strengthening the profile of personal tutoring within the curriculum; and supporting and enhancing colleagues' practice as personal tutors. <p>NB Senior Tutors are to be appointed for the next academic year within the faculty, or the duties of this role redirected to SLSE.</p>
<i>Frequency of meetings</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students will have contact with their personal tutor at least twice a semester, with at least one contact per semester being a synchronous conversation (remote or face to face). Schools are encouraged to go beyond this minimum requirement wherever it is likely to have a positive impact, for example on continuation, completion or progression of students in the School, or School priorities in terms of the performance/metrics of individual programmes. • Where students have been identified as 'at risk', meetings should be more frequent and should be clearly recorded, in line with the SAR process. • These contact points should take place at key points in the academic calendar, such as induction, end of semester, around winter, spring and summer breaks, exam periods, resit periods, submission deadlines and mark release, as deemed appropriate in the School personal tutoring model.
<i>Logging of meetings</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance at and details of personal tutorials will be recorded by Personal Tutors via the Student Engagement Platform (STEP), and at programme/ School management meetings (as appropriate). This will enable sharing of information as necessary (in accordance with students at risk procedure, GDPR regulations, and student privacy notice), and evaluation of the effectiveness of personal tutoring policy and process.
<i>Roles and responsibilities between PT and student</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At their first meeting, the personal tutor and student will review the Student Charter and agree how this will be applied to the personal tutoring relationship. • Resources and guidance will be available on the PT Hub to support a consistent high-quality experience for all tutees, for example a 'checklist' of topics for tutorial discussions.

<i>Engagement with Students at Risk Procedure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal Tutors must ensure they are familiar with the SAR procedures and apply them appropriately with individual students. This will enable us to ensure that appropriate support is put in place for each student at an early stage to enhance outcomes.
<i>Engagement with programme and Faculty Management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal Tutors must be aware of the need to report and share appropriate information in accordance with programme/ School management processes and in line with GDPR and the student privacy notice. This will enable us to maintain oversight of personal tutoring practices and ensure equity of experience for students across the university
<i>Engagement with professional services</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme teams will work with professional services and other areas of the University to develop their Personal Tutoring systems, utilising all support available at St Mary's University to ensure an enhanced and holistic student experience. Specific resources will be available on the PT Hub (SMILE) to aid timely identification of services. Schools will work with Student Services to ensure Personal Tutor/tutee data is accurate and that all parties continuously maintain and update this data and ensure it is readily available to all relevant parties.
<i>Engaging with relevant data and technology</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal tutoring should make full use of appropriate new technologies, in particular the use of learner analytics data available through STEP. Recent research from TASO identifies that there is causal evidence to suggest that the use of learning analytics interventions can improve student outcomes by allowing for the early identification of the challenges they are experiencing¹. For the latest guidance see the PT Hub (SMILE).
<i>Tutor training and development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal Tutors will be expected to engage with ongoing training and development opportunities through the Academic Professional Development Team and Schools/ Faculties. An online Personal Tutoring hub will be established through SMILE as a 'one stop shop' for information, guidance and resources for personal tutoring.
<i>Review and monitoring</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal tutoring will be considered as part of the annual programme review process, to enable programmes to reflect on the student experience and support offered and build any recommendations into the programme enhancement process. Personal tutoring will be an item for discussion in Staff-Student forums.

¹ TASO evidence toolkit: Learning analytics. <https://taso.org.uk/intervention/learning-analytics-postentry/>.

2.4 Guidance

2.4.1. Personal tutors

All members of academic staff, and professional staff who are trained to be personal tutors, are expected to contribute to personal tutoring, with some flexibility to accommodate fractional and/or fixed term contracts which would restrict staff ability to fulfil all PT responsibilities.

The allocation of students to personal tutors will normally be agreed at School level, unless otherwise indicated by the School personal tutoring model, in order to enable allocations to be as balanced as possible. In all cases Personal Tutors will receive an appropriate workload based on their number of tutees, as specified in the academic planning model, so that all students receive parity of personalised tutoring.

2.4.2 Personal tutoring model

It is recognised that the precise details on how personal tutoring is to be provided will need to vary across the University, considering the nature of academic disciplines and what works best for students. The model of personal tutoring will therefore be designed and worked out at the 'local' level and made available on Programme Moodle pages. Schools should be able to demonstrate that their model of personal tutoring addresses the following key areas:

Format of tutorials	The format of tutorial appropriate for each programme <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tutorials may be individual 1:1 meetings, group tutorials or a mixture of both. This recognises the 'added value' group tutorials can offer - for example in building a learning community - but also the need to accommodate personal matters. Further guidance on the respective merits and uses of group or 1:1 tutorials is available on the Personal Tutoring Hub (SMILE).• Where group tutorials are used, students will be able to request 1:1 tutorial(s) as needed to address any confidential or sensitive matters.
Role of asynchronous engagement	How asynchronous engagement (e.g. email, Teams chat) is used to complement synchronous contact.
Mode of meeting	The balance of face to face, virtual tutorials (via Zoom, Teams) or phone calls, as appropriate to the programme mode of delivery, student needs and agreed upon between tutor and tutee.
Frequency of meeting	The number of meetings offered between PTs and tutees <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This should also specify what action is taken when a student does not respond to meeting requests by the tutor.• The intensity of personal tutoring engagement may vary according to individual student needs and over the course of their studies.
Student engagement	How student engagement information is used to inform and shape tailored support for the student's academic journey (e.g. attendance, use of learning resources, assessment completion and success).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PTs should report students identified as non-engaging (in accordance with the personal tutoring and students at risk procedure) and identify the support students have been offered and/or engaged with.
<p>Scheduling of specific sessions at key points during the student journey</p>	<p>How personal tutoring will be responsive to individual student needs at different times in their academic journey.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This should include personal tutoring arrangements at key points for students such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Induction ○ Assessment ○ Resits ○ Academic misconduct processes ○ Career planning <p>How personal tutoring will operate for students while on placement or study/work abroad (where appropriate).</p> <p>How personal tutoring arrangements might differ across student cohorts, according to levels of student need</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • e.g. foundation year vs postgraduate, part time vs accelerated, campus-based vs commuter, member of underrepresented groups,

It is anticipated that any model adopted will include themed tutorials and a mix of group and individual meetings at different levels. For example, Levels 3- 6 Sem1 Group tutorial, Individual tutorial around Wobble week, email at end of Sem1. Sem 2 Individual Tutorial feedback from Semester 1, optional at end of Sem2. Level 7 individual tutorials. Guidance and resources for personal tutors will be made available on the Personal Tutor hub.

Understanding roles and responsibilities is key to any partnership working well and bringing benefit to all concerned. At the first meeting, the PT and student will review the Student Charter and discuss how this applies to personal tutoring, helping to clarify expectations and responsibilities.

2.4.3 Personal tutoring in the academic cycle, including Induction and Welcome

Induction and Welcome stand out as significant points in the year for personal tutoring to be clearly established to set the course for the rest of the academic year. A group or individual personal tutoring event should be held during Welcome and individual tutor/tutee allocations confirmed then or shortly afterwards. Additional guidance is available on the Personal Tutoring Hub (SMILE).

Where possible the first Personal Tutor contact should be included in the programme's Welcome timetable, helping to signal to students its centrality to their studies and also minimise administrative burden on Personal Tutors/programme teams.

Checks will take place in October by Senior Tutors to assure that all students have been allocated a personal tutor and a centralised point where this information is held.

For students identified as 'at risk' or on Leave of Absence, the relevant procedure should be followed.

In some programmes, it will be appropriate for students to remain with the same Personal Tutor throughout their period of study, unless the Tutee requests a change of Personal Tutor (see below), the Personal Tutor leaves or the student changes programme. In other programmes, it may work better for students to be allocated a Personal Tutor depending on their level of study. This will be decided depending on local context and specified in the School model.

If a student wishes to change their Personal Tutor at any point throughout their studies, they should contact the Senior Tutor for their School. Any requests of this nature should receive a response within five working days and the request should normally be granted. Once the change to the assigned Personal Tutor has been made, these updates will be reflected in the central register.

2.4.4 Training and development of tutors

Personal tutors and Senior Tutors will be supported through appropriate training and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities to enhance their practice, thereby increasing confidence and competency. Personal tutoring will also be appropriately recognised and resourced in the academic workload model, and rewarded via the academic career pathway.

A Personal Tutoring Hub will act as a 'one stop shop' for PTs to find relevant support, training and resources: additional details about all features below can be accessed via the Hub.

For new staff joining the university, induction training will include personal tutor training covering core issues such as the role of the personal tutor, setting professional boundaries and understanding our students.

Established staff will receive refresher training on the role of the personal tutor and opportunities to develop and enhance their practice through sessions on important thematic issues identified as significant to personal tutoring and year group of students (e.g. neurodiversity, equality, diversity and inclusion, employability).

Senior Tutors within each School will provide further practical support to personal tutors, primarily as a point of contact for advice, direction and signposting. Senior Tutors will also host cluster meetings of personal tutors within the School to share good practice, find solutions and for informal peer support. Within these clusters key themes to address within tutorials will be identified in consultation with student support services.

The Personal Tutor Forum is a university-wide forum which will help to connect all personal tutors, provide a forum for knowledge exchange with external specialists and to continue to enhance the provision of personal tutoring across the university. The Personal Tutor Forum will run three times a year in the format of an invited guest speaker followed by an opportunity to discuss issues and share good practice.

Wellbeing support for tutors is also necessary to provide the space and tools they need to nurture their own mental health and wellbeing as they assist students. This will be a theme regularly addressed at cluster team

meetings and the Personal Tutor Forum. Personal tutors will also be signposted to and encouraged to engage with the university's team of Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA) for confidential 1:1 support.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Senior Tutors will be appointed in Schools to act as a focal point for personal tutoring and signpost tutors to relevant training and resources.

The personal tutoring model will also outline the respective responsibilities, and liaison between, other relevant roles including the Course Team, Learning Development Lecturers and Pastoral Tutors (where appointed). This should include, but need not be limited to, personal tutoring as a standing agenda item at relevant team meetings, to ensure regular review of students' progress and the PT model.

Senior Tutors and Subject Leads for Student Experience, in liaison with others as outlined above, will ensure the School model includes details of how to utilise introductory assignments (as recommended in the Student Retention Strategy) and what form this should take to maximise effectiveness in the local context.

Personal tutors and course teams will monitor students at risk to ensure that these students are engaging with additional support and ensuring the effectiveness of any interventions initiated.

Recording and monitoring

Personal tutoring appointments and interventions to be recorded via the Student Engagement Platform (STEP) for purposes of monitoring, auditing and student wellbeing.

Reporting to Programme Leads,

Safeguarding

All Personal Tutors should be aware of and comply with the University's safeguarding policies and procedures, including those for students under the age of 18 years. [Safeguarding Policy](#)

4. RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

This policy should be read in conjunction with the University's Attendance and Student Engagement Policy, the Personal Tutoring and Student at Risk Procedure.

Use of personal tutoring and engagement data complies with Data Protection legislation (including the UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018 and any supplemental legislation) and is handled in accordance with the University [Data Protection Policy](#). The Data Protection Officer ("DPO") is responsible for overseeing this policy and developing related policies and privacy guidelines. That post is held by the University Secretary. The DPO can be contacted on:- Email: gdpr@stmarys.ac.uk

Data on personal tutoring and student engagement is managed in accordance with the [Student Privacy Notice](#), which sets out the University's commitment to using student data in ways that are ethical, beneficial, legal and proportionate.

Guidance for staff and students using the Student Engagement Platform (STEP) can be found on the Personal Tutor Hub (SMILE).

Detailed information on the process for monitoring personal tutees / students at risk and student engagement can be found in the [personal tutoring and student at risk procedure](#) document.

Information for students on personal tutoring via the Student Engagement Platform can be found on the student intranet pages.

The following policies & procedures are also related to this procedure:

- Retention strategy
- Personal Tutor & Student at Risk Procedure
- Attendance & Engagement Policy & Procedure
- Assessment & Feedback policy
- [Leave of Absence Policy](#)
- [Extenuating Circumstance Policy](#)
- [Safeguarding Policy](#)

5. REVIEW, APPROVAL AND PUBLICATION

- This policy will be reviewed by the LTSO / SPSE committees before final approval
- This policy will require final approval by the Academic Board
- This policy will be published on the St Mary's University Website

6. DOCUMENT CONTROL INFORMATION

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Executive Owner	Head of Student Experience
Operational Owner	Personal Tutors / Senior Personal Tutors / Course Leads / HOS / Student Engagement Team / Student Success Team.
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Related University Policy Documents	Retention Strategy Student Visa Engagement & Monitoring Policy Student Attendance & Engagement Procedure Personal Tutoring Policy Personal Tutoring Procedure Leave of Absence Policy Extenuating Circumstance Policy Fitness to Study Policy
<i>For Office Use – Keywords for search function</i>	Personal Tutor , Personal Tutoring , Students at Risk