Informatics Personal Tutors’ Briefing

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September 2016
Purpose of this meeting

- Review what the Personal Tutoring system is about and how we implement it in Informatics
- Go over important PT-related procedures
- Give an overview of the PT online notes system
- Highlight changes in the system this year

Please interrupt with questions and discussion at any point!
What do PTs do for us?

- Happy, well advised students are more fun to teach.
- They rate us better in the National Student Survey, which increases the number of good students who apply, which means it’s more fun to teach.
How good are we?

- About 85% of our students (who answer surveys) think they have a good/excellent PT.
- About 15% think they have a lousy PT.
- It’s that 15% of high negativity that screws our ratings. (Same applies across the board, for assessment feedback etc. etc.)
- All you have to do not to be one of the 15% is to respond timeously and kindly to students, meet them as necessary, take necessary actions, and not be afraid to punt to me (or other appropriate person) anything you’re unsure about.
Officially:

We tell all our undergrads and taught postgrads:

*Your Personal Tutor and the wider support network provided by Informatics and by the University will work with you in partnership as you*

- become a more confident learner in your discipline and play an active part in your academic community;
- reflect on your academic progress and make the most effective use of your academic feedback;
- develop the range of skills and attributes required for success at university and beyond.

(From the School’s Personal Tutoring Statement, dictated by the University)
Meaning that Personal Tutors . . .

- Give advice on course and programme choices
- Review past performance and engagement
- Discuss how to improve study skills
- Help with course registration
- Provide advice on University rules and regulations
- Provide support if circumstances impact studies (e.g. health issues)
- Write academic references

Delivered by 1–1 meeting at start of semester/year, plus email and other meetings when necessary.
MSc Students

- Role and responsibilities of MSc PTs are very similar to those of undergrad PTs
- MSc students have a third 1-1 meeting in June
- There are two other meetings, but these can be folded in to course group activities
- The School will try to allocate MSc students to appropriate PTs
  - Load balancing hard as over 50% of expected students don’t turn up
Peer Support

▶ Every School is expected to provide one or more kinds of peer support schemes

▶ In Informatics, ongoing activities that can be regarded as having a peer support element include
  ▶ CompSoc activities,
  ▶ Student Tech Meetups,
  ▶ InfBase,
  ▶ Course-centric online discussion forums.

▶ Our Student Support Coordinator (David Aspinall) works on enhancing the School’s peer support schemes, for example,
  ▶ providing peer support during lab sessions
  ▶ having peer-organised tutorial preparation sessions
Personal Tutor electronic records

- Euclid (for us), MyEd (for students)
- Keeps a sequence of Meetings and Notes entries, as well as Course results and Progression decisions.
- Students have full visibility of all entries
- Students can add entries to their record, as can any authorised University staff member
  - E.g. Senior Tutor, project supervisor
- Entries can be deleted, but a ‘deleted entry’ note remains.
Topics for electronic record entries

Minimalist approach: PT and other staff record
- Notes on each meeting, including agreed actions, course choices etc.
- Problems and special circumstances (confidentially)
- Progression decisions, SCC outcomes, etc.

Maximalist approach: PT also writes advice, praise, warnings.
Student notes, e.g.,
- Satisfaction with recent progress
- subjects or skills that need attention
- Career areas of interest
- Experiences in summer jobs and internships
resulting in a detailed portfolio record of the student’s career here.

Personal Tutors and students are encouraged to experiment
Requirements on use of Euclid

Use of the student record is not optional.

- You **must** record each of the mandatory scheduled meetings.
- **Please** record a brief note, confidential if appropriate, about anything that may affect assessment or progression decisions.
Confidentiality

» Currently system provides 2 levels of access restriction
  » By default all authorised university staff
  » Can restrict to student, Personal Tutor, Senior Tutor, Student Support Team and Dean of Students

» Personal Tutors and students may not wish to use system for particularly sensitive information
  » in these cases, still important to leave some trace on system: could just say that some special circumstances were noted and advice was given

» In general, PTs and students are encouraged not to restrict visibility
  » As they do so, possible support provided by the Uni becomes more limited

» See ESS Briefing Note on *Writing Notes and Confidentiality* for further guidance
Student record versus email/paper

- Information that is long-lasting or important should be on Euclid. (For Senior Tutor, next PT, or if current PT is unavailable.)

- Email often more convenient for discussion – when an important conclusion is reached, make a note on Euclid.
  - Data protection: how long to keep student email? When student leaves, try distilling out the info you need for writing references, and discard the email.

- If student tells you very confidential stuff, agree with them whether it may be noted (confidentially) on Euclid, whether it’s definitely never to go beyond you, etc.
Confidentiality – relatives

The University’s relationship is with the student. You may not discuss any aspect of the student’s career here outside the University, unless you have the student’s permission. Not even with parents. (Genuine emergencies excepted, but if there’s time to seek advice, do.)
1-to-1 Meetings: how many, how important?

For you, no choice: you must schedule them.

- **UG1**: start of each semester. **Also**, mid-semester 1, but you can choose to do this in groups instead.
- **UG2**: start of each semester.
- **UG3,4,5**: start of year.
- **MSc**: start of each semester, and early in summer.

Start of year meetings are **essential**: you confirm attendance at these. Some students will balk at S2 meetings, but try to get them to show up for a couple of minutes at least.

The UG1 mid-S1 meeting is a result of widespread requests from UG1s across the university to get to know their PTs better early on.
1-to-1 Meetings: Activities

- Review past performance and engagement
- If student is carrying courses, or even re-taking, discuss how they’re going to manage.
- Give advice on obtaining additional support
  - relating directly to study skills
  - relating to other factors impacting studies
- Discuss direction of studies
  - Is student happy?
  - Is student wanting to explore alternative programmes?
- Consider career plans
- Choose optional courses (Years 1 & 2) - you implement this!
- Advise on Honours courses (Years 3, 4, 5, MSc)
- Discuss project (Years 4 & 5 and MSc)
- Confirm attendance (Semester 1 only)
1-to-1 Meetings: How long?

- For freshers in S1, you will probably want to have about 20 minutes of interaction. 30 minutes will allow for making notes on Euclid with student present.
- Thereafter, it’s very student-dependent. In S2, I offer blocks of 10-minute slots, and ask students to book one or two (or occasionally three) as they wish.
- 2nd year is often straightforward even in S1 – just one outside course to choose.
- 3rd and 4th year involve course choices – students will want to discuss these, so probably at least 20 mins again.
1-to-1 Meetings: Preparation

- Schedule meetings using sign-up sheets, email or Doodle
- Students asked to fill in prompt form
  - How satisfied are you with your recent progress?
  - What study skills do you feel you need to work on?
  - Are there any issues that have impacted your studies that you would like to discuss?
  - Are you happy with the direction of your studies?
  - If you have course choices to make, what do you have in mind? Why?
  - Is there anything else you wish to discuss?
- Use of *Record a future meeting* EUCLID functionality encouraged, but not essential
  - Helps Senior Tutor, ITO, College track what’s going on
1-to-1 Meetings: During meetings

- Add brief notes to electronic Meeting record entry concerning:
  - topics discussed
  - matters agreed on
  - recommendations made
- Add notes either using *Record a recent meeting* feature or as *Comment* on entry created using the *Record a future meeting* feature.
- Ask your student to add a follow-up *Comment* entry, filling out details and reflecting on meeting
1-to-1 Meetings: After meetings

- Check up on the notes added by students
- Add a *Comment*, confirming correctness, clarifying points, and adding further remarks, as needed
Mandatory Additional Meetings

- Usually in groups, involving perhaps 8–12 students. 25 is too many.
- Suggest holding them as follows:
  - UG1/UG2 group meetings in middle of S2 (possibly hang it off ILW)
- Personal Tutors facilitate discussion on topics such as
  - study skills, time management skills, work habits and exam-taking tips found most useful,
  - particularly-recommended optional courses,
  - experiences from summer jobs or study abroad years,
  - advice on how to best improve programming skills,
  - job hunting and possible future careers.
- Students are strongly encouraged to add some reflective note to their record after the meeting
Exchanges

To discuss in second-year meetings:

▶ Students can go on exchange in 3rd year. Only for good (≥B average, typically) students. Often very positive.
▶ Some exchanges with major US universities (straight A transcript helpful – point this out to freshers!)
▶ Erasmus is a European scheme. We want to encourage more of our students to go out.
▶ More info from International Office.
▶ Hiroshi Shimodaira is our exchange coordinator.
Choosing Optional Courses

- For Years 1 & 2: **Hard Deadline for S1**: Fri 30 September.
  - PTs take care of registration
  - There is advice in PT statement, and see
  - http://homepages.inf.ed.ac.uk/imurray2/pt/outside_courses.html (Thanks to Iain Murray!)
  - Courses in HSS often have caps: **enrol early**.
- For Years 3–5 and MSc: **Deadline**: Friday 23 September.
  - Students use the PATH system to build their curriculum; ITO takes it from there and registers courses
  - The PT Statement includes basic advice
  - The Year Handbooks provide detailed guidance
- If students want to do courses not in their degree, consult – we try to be flexible.
- S1 Changes after 2 Oct: (a) don't, (b) if you must, contact ITO.
- S2 courses can be changed up to end of S2 week 2.
Honours/Postgrad Informatics Courses

They have a *level* and a *normal year taken*.

- UG3 students take level 9/10 *Year 3* courses
- UG4 students take level 10/11 *Year 3 or Year 4* courses
- UG5 students take level 11 *Year 4 or postgraduate* courses
- MSc students must take at least 90 credits of level 11 courses, and up to 30 credits of level 9/10 courses, irrespective of the year labellings.

If you deal with outside students, be aware that not all non-Informatics degree programmes have been updated to reflect this – other schools may need to give concessions to allow the intended effect.
Web Timetables (1)

- All information on lecture, tutorial and lab scheduling has been removed from course descriptors in the DRPS
- Instead course descriptors link to the new Web Timetables system
- Unfortunately
  - presentation of information leaves a lot to be desired,
  - the data for tutorials and labs is incomplete,
  - functionality for clash checking not available.
Web Timetables (2)

- For times and locations of lectures for Informatics courses, it is simplest to consult the timetables on the ITO web pages.
- For Year 1 & 2 outside course lecture timing, consult the outside courses web page.
- Course Timetable Browser on MyEd.
- The PATH system gives a pictorial view of the DRPS: https://path.is.ed.ac.uk/
Confirming attendance

You must confirm attendance (with the button on the Euclid Programme/Session tab) at start of year.

▶ For all students in attendance, you cannot confirm attendance until you have physically seen the student.

▶ For students taking an (exam/assessment)-only repeat year, or for students studying abroad, you can just confirm. (But for the latter, try to get an email confirming they’re at their host institution.)

▶ Do NOT confirm students who cannot yet progress – see next page.
Handling Progression Issues (1)

- Students who have not fully satisfied the requirement for their degree and year are considered by a Progression Board.
- In easier cases, the Board may ask you to interview the student and report back. If so, please act promptly.
- Problematic cases are interviewed by the Senior Tutor or the Progression Officer (Colin Stirling), who report to the Board.
- Some major cases require permission from College. You will be asked to prepare the case, or to assist with this.
Handling Progression Issues (2)

You must not confirm a student’s attendance on EUCLID until continuation is approved. If their latest progression decision is:

- ‘Progress’ or ‘Conditional Progression’: you may confirm;
- ‘Progression deferred’: you may not confirm, unless I or Colin explicitly tell you you may;
- ‘No Progression: Repeat Year Needed’: you may confirm, and should implement the change of Year of Study (see PT web pages).
- ‘No Progression: Transfer to another Degree’: you shouldn’t see this any more – if you do, contact me.
- anything else: don’t confirm. The student is almost certainly leaving. If they don’t think they are, await instructions.
Concessions, Interruptions of Study, and Programme Changes

- Concessions enable students to continue studies on slight variations of Programmes of Study as described in DPTs
  - E.g. a student might need permission to resit a failed Year 1 course while simultaneously taking a follow-on Year 2 course
- Interruptions ‘stop the clock’, usually for medical reasons.
- Students can change degrees under some circumstances.
- See the PT web pages for extensive guidance.
During the year

You probably won’t have to do very much, except hold the scheduled meetings and answer the occasional query. Feel free to engage more actively, though.

There is one **important** task during the year:
Special Circumstances

are things outside the student’s control that significantly adversely affect their performance.

▶ It is the student’s responsibility to report these to you.
▶ Nonetheless, you should actively investigate as soon as you hear of unexpected poor performance or non-attendance (you will get many automatic reports).
▶ If you get reports of non-submitted coursework, contact the student: especially important for Tier 4 (overseas) students. Immigration consequences can follow!
▶ Bear in mind that particularly with depressive illnesses, students may not feel able to report without prompting.
▶ Once you are aware, it is your responsibility to submit a case to all the relevant Boards of Examiners. See PT pages for further guidance.
▶ You will be reminded of this at the key times.
Important Sources of Information (1)

- Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study (DRPS)
  - Also has information on all courses
- Web Timetables system
- Informatics Personal Tutoring Statement
- College-level Personal Tutor Resources
- IAD (Institute for Academic Development) guidance for Personal Tutors
- EUCLID Guide to Student Administration by Personal Tutors
- Enhancing Student Support Wiki

All these and more are linked to from the Informatics Personal Tutor Resource page http://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/student-services/ito/staff/pt
Important Sources of Information (2)

- People
  - Other Personal Tutors
  - The Senior Tutor
  - The Student Progression Officer
  - The SCAO
  - The Student Support Team in the ITO

- If you need urgent advice, please feel free to use the phone (505998).
Updates for 2016/17

A few things have changed, notably the Special Circumstances Policy. Small things:

▶ No more VAT restrictions. You can meet students in the Forum at any time. **NOTE** that if you meet students outside 09:00-17:00 (which is discouraged), it is your responsibility to get them in and out of the building.

▶ Hons/MSc students are now building course choices on PATH, whence the ITO harvests them. You still advise.
Ordinary degree

Owing to unhelpful regulatory actions by the centre and by UKVI, we have changed our procedures, though the intent is unchanged.

▶ Students who fail the UG2 honours hurdle will not be changed to the Ordinary degree. They will be given Conditional Progression to Honours, conditional on 55% at first attempt in UG3.

▶ If they fail the UG3 hurdle in June:
  ▶ if they have 80 credits and a 40% average, they will get an Ordinary
  ▶ otherwise they get transferred to Ordinary, and then have to pass all failed courses in (up to 3) re-sits. **NOTE** that we cannot do this for Tier 4 students, unless they leave the country and apply for a new visa, which may not be granted.
Revised Special Circumstances Policy

For PTs, the most important changes are:

▶ Long-term conditions (in ptic. mental health issues) are excluded:
  ▶ They should be dealt with by adjustments (see Disability Services).
  ▶ But acute flare-ups can be SCs.

It is entirely unclear how well this is going to work in reality...

▶ SCCs are now free to consider all sources of evidence (e.g. from friends, relatives, flatmates) and use their academic judgement to decide how weighty it is.
The other significant change for BoEs is:

▶ SCCs make *binding* decisions what SCs happened, and what their impact on assessments was, using all available information; they may *recommend* actions,

▶ but BoEs are now able to make their own decisions on appropriate actions, with a view across all the assessments. (Back to the future...)

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Minor procedural improvements

Until now, when a student asks to change degree, SCAO tells you to do it. Henceforth, the ITO will do it. Withdrawals you should still process yourself. Working on one or two others...