

Supporting Students Beyond the Course

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In previous sessions, we have seen...

- What student support responsibilities tutors, demonstrators and TAs have, and their limits
- What tutors could do to help students develop study skills in order to prevent poor presentation, incomplete work and plagiarism in coursework
- Briefly, how tutors and demonstrators could help students develop problem solving skills
- An enumeration of some sources of support in our university

Schedule

- Presentation by Iris Sloan from the Student Counselling Service:
 - Our responsibilities
 - What is mental health?
 - Responding to distress
 - Boundaries and confidentiality
 - How to contact the Student Counselling Service
- Presentation by Janet Gardiner from the Student Disability Service:
 - The services offered by the Student Disability Service
 - Different types of disabilities, learning difficulties and mental health conditions
 - How to behave with students having them

Schedule

- Why is support beyond the contents of the course important for students?
- Support boundaries
- **Academic support-** How can we help students develop their study and related skills, especially if relevant for assignments? What do the Personal Tutoring System and Institute for Academic Development (IAD) offer?
- **Personal support-** Which university services should we direct students to? Focus on those which are more relevant to us.
- General tips and tricks for responding to support requests

Why is support beyond the contents of the course important for students?

- Students need knowledge, but also **academic and related transferrable skills** in order to solve complex tasks in labs, tutorials, assignments, exams
- Especially in first years, students may be **unaware of what is expected of them** and how they are supposed to study
- Students **may easily become anxious or concerned** at different stages in their studies (e.g. by exams, gaining qualifications for jobs, money matters, etc.), **and/or have social group problems** and tutors and demonstrators may feel more approachable (closer in age, enthusiastic, there to help)

Are we (tutors/demonstrators/markers/TAs) well placed for providing guidance?

- Yes, much more than we sometimes appreciate because:
 - We have the knowledge but also basic skills required for the course
 - It is our responsibility to know of its requirements and what is expected of students!
 - We may have taken the course ourselves, and thus be able to advise on studying for it
 - We have surely accumulated experience about studying in university in general
 - We know more about where to find help in case of difficulties
- Difficulties: our enthusiasm and good results in the course may differentiate us to students, not prescribing 'recipes for success', level of support vs. time

Support boundaries

- It is not our responsibility or appropriate to provide support on matters not directly related to the course work
- For personal matters, you should not try to advise or ask for many details; Instead, it is best to direct the student to a university service which is specialised in the kind of support that they need; If not sure about the right service, direct student to the student support officers or personal tutor
- It is not in your interest or the student's to agree to meet on a regular basis; this is the role of the counselling or medical services.

Academic support

Academic support

- In small groups, write ideas on poster paper for helping students develop:
 - Problem solving skills (essential in Informatics courses)
 - Academic writing skills (for writing essays, articles, etc.) including referencing skills (and avoiding plagiarism)
 - Presentation skills
 - Skills for tackling coursework/exams (thus improving self confidence)

1. Some ideas for helping students develop problem solving skills

- **If you see students in class (tutors/demonstrators/some TAs):**
 - Encourage reading the problem carefully to uncover keywords, unnecessary or unclear information
 - Encourage working backwards from the goal
 - Give students time to come up with ideas for tackling the problem
 - Break difficult tasks into subtasks to tackle in turn, using step-by-step approach
 - Ask students for ideas on how to proceed rather than solutions
 - Ask students to articulate assumptions

1. Some ideas for helping students develop problem solving skills

- Prompt students to explain their thought process and evaluate progress
- Develop analytical thinking by encouraging students to ask questions and redirect them to the class
- Discuss different ways of solving a problem
- Ask specific questions to test for learning

1. Some ideas for helping students develop problem solving skills

- **If marking:**
 - Put value on steps and argumentation (consult with CO/TA!)
 - Break your feedback into the different steps
 - Use questions to get students thinking about cases not considered
 - Comment on the clarity of the student's thought process
- **If you design course material as a TA**, you could explicitly break tasks and request certain contents, especially for first year students and first tasks
- Encourage students to attend IAD courses on problem solving

2. Some ideas for helping students develop academic writing skills

- **If you see students in class:**
 - Bring examples of academic writing and discuss structure, contents, layout, presentation
 - Advise students on standard structure (Introduction, Related Work, main body, Conclusion, Acknowledgements, References), its purpose and importance
 - Help students prepare a plan for sections and paragraphs
 - Emphasise the importance of summaries, linking and signposting words
 - Ask students to practice writing abstracts (being convincing while brief)

2. Some ideas for helping students develop academic writing skills

- Remind students about plagiarism and its consequences
- Advise them to make a note of all sources used (ideally, in a database) and cite them in the text, using quotes for the author's direct words
- Provide examples of referencing styles
- Explain to students that they should write in their own words for their own purposes, and not just report what others have said
- **If you mark academic writing:**
 - Touch on all of the issues from above and point the student to useful online resources
 - We are required to report plagiarism

2. Some ideas for helping students develop academic writing skills

- **If you design course material as a TA:**
 - Include clear requirements for the structure, content, layout and presentation of coursework including academic writing, especially for students who are new to it
 - Provide links to useful online resources
- Point the students to IAD LearnBetter and “Good Academic Practice” resources, and encourage them to attend IAD courses on academic writing

3. Some ideas for helping students develop presentation skills

- Remind or help students work out a plan for the presentation (purpose, structure, audience, duration), discuss how it will be assessed
- Discuss with them what makes for a good presentation (e.g. designing slides, keeping track of time, intonation, tone, facial expression, movement, eye contact, posture, etc.) maybe by watching online presentations (e.g. on TED)
- Point the students to online examples of very successful presentations
- Encourage them to rehearse (with colleagues/in the mirror), give feedback

3. Some ideas for helping students develop presentation skills

- When you give feedback, offer suggestions for improving presentation
- If the quality of the presentation is not assessed, discuss with the CO offering bonus marks for good presentations as extra motivation
- **If you design the requirements for the presentation as a TA:**
 - Make the criteria for a good presentation (even by including the marking scheme) clear
 - Provide links to useful examples and online resources

4. Some ideas for helping students develop skills for tackling coursework

- **If you see students in class**, provide them with all the necessary information:
 - What is expected, assessment criteria, format, deadlines (essential for you to know!)

BUT ALSO

- Solve tasks in a similar way, using the same format in class
- If sample solutions are provided, advocate for them to be in line with assessment
- If possible, make reference to and discuss past exam papers

4. Some ideas for helping students develop skills for tackling coursework

- **If you are a marker:**
 - Praise good parts and offer suggestions for better meeting expectations in feedback
 - When discussing feedback, prompt the student to help him/her develop ideas while being strict about requirements
 - If marking follow up assignment, comment on the progress made by the student and praise good progress

4. Some ideas for helping students develop skills for tackling coursework

- **If you design the coursework as a TA:**
 - Do your best to write clear instructions and be open to update them if necessary
 - Consider including frequently asked questions
 - Develop a detailed marking scheme first and structure it according to it
 - Keep clear links and be consistent with lectures/labs/tutorials
- Point the students to IAD LearnBetter Essentials on revision and exams

The Personal Tutor System

- In small groups, browse through the personal tutoring statement and links and look for answers to the following questions:
 1. What is the role of the personal tutor?
 2. What does he/she help students with? How can he/she be contacted?
 3. How frequently do personal tutors meet with their students?
 4. Who is responsible for administration/ teaching matters/ academic advice/ personal advice?
 5. How quickly should the personal tutor respond? What if he/she is unavailable?
 6. Is information discussed during personal tutor meetings kept confidential?

Other sources of academic support in Informatics

- **InfPALS** (for 1st year students and 2nd year 2nd semester):
 - Weekly sessions led by later-year students (PALS leaders/facilitators), who facilitate (not teach) sessions on some of their more complicated core courses
 - Practice for exams, developing learning skills, getting used to university life, making friends
- **InfBASE** (for 1st and 2nd year students)
 - Student helpdesk led by experienced tutors on core pre-honours courses; can also be used as study group
- **Programming Club** (for 1st and 2nd year students)
 - Voluntary course aimed to develop students' programming skills

Study Skills Support by the IAD

- Individually, spend a few minutes browsing through the IAD website (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development>) for information on their services for study skills support for different students

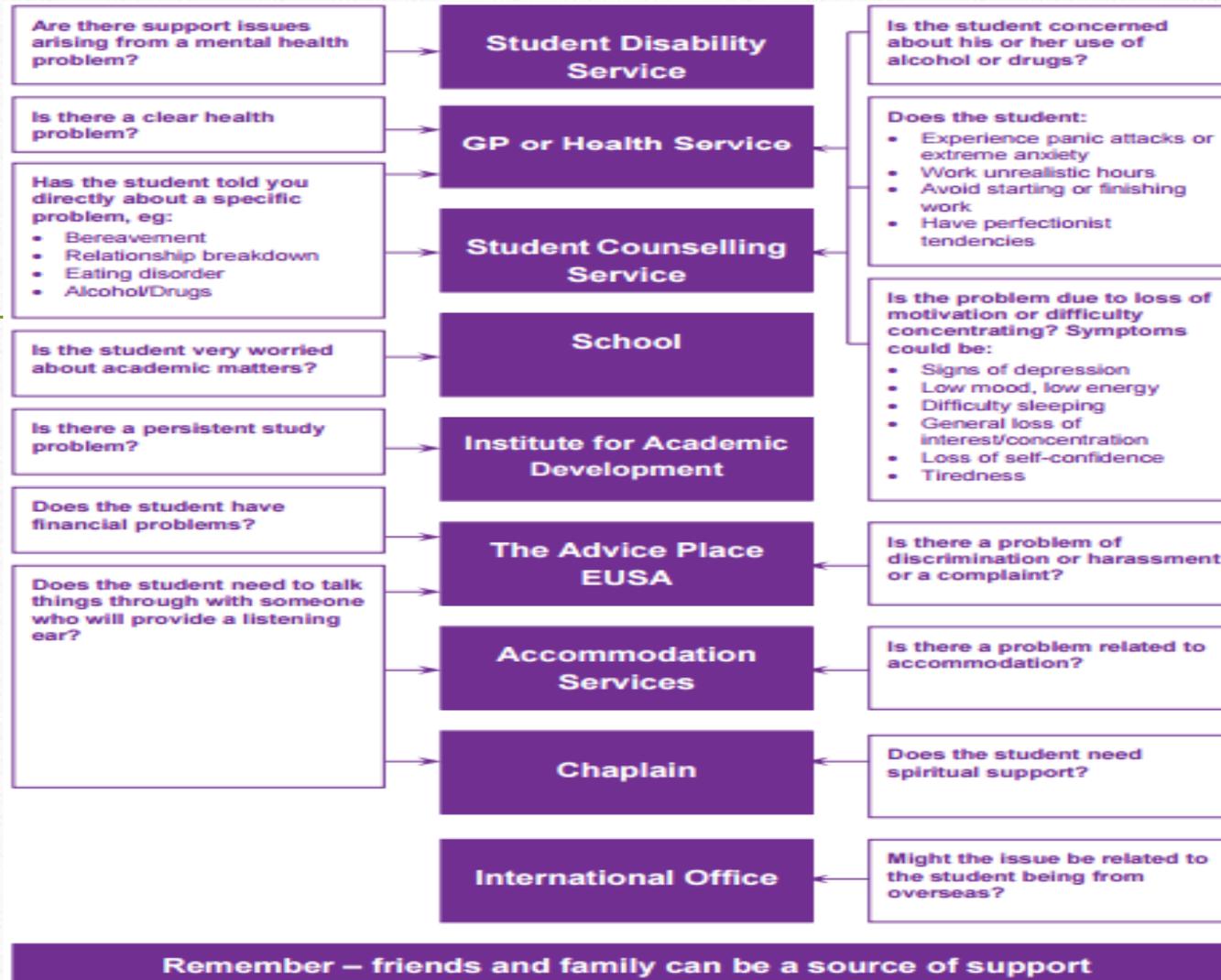
Personal support

Sources of personal support

- Student Support Officers; Less now, the Personal Tutor System
- Student Disability Service
- Student Counselling Service
- The Advice Place EUSA
- Accommodation Services
- Chaplain
- Careers Service
- Edinburgh Global (former International Office)

Sources of personal support

- Individually, think about a scenario in which you are asked for help on a personal matter by a student. Use the diagrams in the “Helping distressed students” guide to find a university service which could help the student.



(taken from “Helping distressed students” guide)

Sources of personal support

- As split into 2 groups, spend a few minutes browsing through the services offered by:
 - The Informatics Student Support Team: <http://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/student-services/ito/admin/student-support>
 - The Advice Place EUSA: https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/support_and_advice/the_advice_place/
 - The Careers Service: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/careers>
- Share your findings with your colleagues

Tips and tricks for responding to student support requests

- Listen to the student to encourage him/her to explain and not make a wrong impression!
- Avoid taking notes (distracting!) unless absolutely necessary (ask for agreement if so)
- Whether you like the student and the issue raised is irrelevant
- Avoid trying to comfort the student by making the issue seem nonsignificant (e.g. “You will manage, don’t worry!”); you should keep opinions to yourself and not act as a counsellor.

Tips and tricks for responding to student support requests

- Classify the problem to decide whether:
 - you can solve it (e.g. provide resources)
 - you need to direct the student to a university service
 - the student can cope
- Be discrete, but do not promise complete confidentiality and advise about the need to contact the PT/CO; encourage the student to contact them if his/her performance may be affected.

Resources

- [Informatics Teaching Support training webpage](#)
- **“Tutoring and Demonstrating: a Handbook” [chapter 7](#)** (“Supporting and Advising Students”)
- **“Advising students on personal and academic matters” material on the [“IAD Resources on Tutoring and Demonstrating” channel in Learn](#)**
- IAD course [“Advising on personal and academic matters”, Wed 3 Apr 2019](#)

Resources

- [University of Edinburgh Support Services](#)
- The [“Helping distressed students” guide](#) for staff of the Student Disability Service