THE ACADEMIC TUTOR SYSTEM

Policy

This Policy was approved by the University Board for Teaching and Learning in October 2018 for implementation in the academic session 2018-19 [and revised in January 2020 and October 2020].

In the case of the Henley Business School, the principles of the ATS apply with minor variations as indicated in the text.

In the case of international partners, local variations may apply.

In the case of UoRM, the Principles of the Academic Tutor System will be applied as appropriate to the UoRM context, supported with local systems and processes.

The Principles of the Academic Tutor System

1. The Academic Tutor System (ATS) will help to ensure that the University provides a consistent level of academic and pastoral support to students that:

   - integrates effectively with the wide range of support available to students at Reading;
   - is appropriate to the context of the discipline;
   - has clear and congruent expectations from students and staff; that
   - with staff who are adequately trained and supported to execute important roles; and that
   - those roles are valued across the institution.
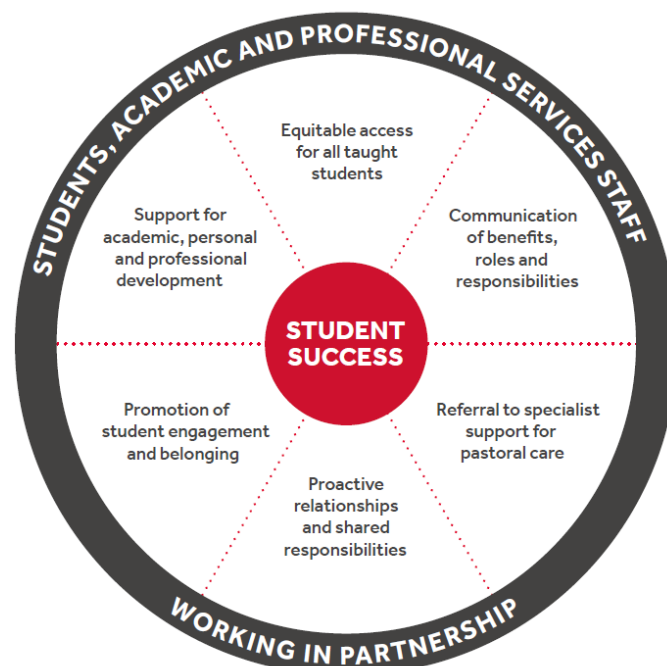
The ATS is underpinned by the following principles to provide consistency of experience for staff and students across the University:

1. **Equitable access for all taught students (UG, PGT, DL and PT)[1]:** All taught students have access to effective academic and personal support, including a named Academic Tutor, and understand what minimum contact they can expect.
2. **Supporting students' academic, personal and professional development:** 'In-School'[2] student support focuses primarily on supporting students' academic, personal and professional development, aligned to discipline needs and requirements and delivered in partnership with relevant professional services. Roles and responsibilities enable academic and professional services staff to focus on their areas of expertise and signpost students to other members of staff or specialist services as appropriate.
3. **Communication of benefits, roles and responsibilities:** All students and staff understand the benefits of academic tutoring and the shared responsibilities of all of those involved. With support from central communications teams, Schools take a proactive approach to articulating the importance of tutoring to students and staff, promoting engagement. Communication activities also underpin principles 4 and 5.
4. **Proactive relationships and shared responsibilities:** Academic Tutors establish proactive, effective and long-lasting relationships with their tutees that promote positive engagement within the academic community. Students ensure that they are active participants, working in partnership with their tutor to support their academic, personal and professional development. Schools work in partnership with colleagues in student support services to monitor engagement with the ATS and embed a proactive programme of academic, personal and professional development support in the School (see Figure 1).
5. **Promoting student engagement and belonging:** Academic, personal and professional support is for all students, not just those facing issues or in need of help, it is integral to the student experience and empowers students to make the most of their time at University, engaging fully with their studies, developing essential graduate attributes and fulfilling their potential.
6. **Referral to specialist support for pastoral care:** Academic Tutors, School Directors of Academic Tutoring (SDATs), Student Support Coordinators (SSCs) and Student Welfare Officers (SWOs) are able to identify student support needs and refer students to specialist support services using risk-based referral systems. Schools and Functions identify common issues being faced by specific student groups and adjust the provision of or access to support as needed.

School roles and responsibilities

Academic Tutors
2. Academic Tutors will act as a key contact for their tutees within their School / Department, establishing effective and long-lasting relationships that promote positive engagement within the academic community. Academic Tutors will play a crucial role in upholding and embedding the principles of the Academic Tutor System, working in partnership with their tutees to support

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[1] UG – Undergraduate students, PGT – Post Graduate Taught students, DL – Distance Learning students, PT - Part-Time students.
[2] **'In-School' support:** School/Departmental Directors of Academic Tutoring (SDATs); Academic Tutors; academic and wellbeing programmes/initiatives for students supported centrally but delivered 'in-School (e.g. PAL, Positive Minds, etc.); and central support for SDATs/Academic Tutors (e.g. development opportunities, evaluation/impact, etc.).

their academic, personal and professional development through proactive relationships and structured academic conversations informed by student data (e.g. RISIS Tutor Card, Student Progress Dashboard). Academic Tutors will be responsible for signposting students to specialist central services for pastoral support as appropriate (see also *Appendix 1 Role of the Academic Tutor*). Suggested sample agendas for Tutee meetings are attached as *Appendix 2.*

3. At appropriate points in the student journey, Academic Tutors are responsible for providing support across the following themes:

   - **Academic support and study skills:** Academic Tutors will assist students to reflect on their academic progress to date, including working with students to identify their strengths and weaknesses in relation to academic study skills and encouraging students to make plans and/or take up opportunities to develop these (e.g. Study Advice, Liaison Librarians, Maths Support, English Language Support, etc.). Academic Tutors will also help students to make decisions in relation to their course and to connect with other academics in their field of study.
   - **Assessment and feedback:** Academic Tutors will support students to review and reflect holistically on feedback they have received on assessed work, developing their ability to build on knowledge and progress successfully. Academic Tutors will work with students to identify consistent patterns in feedback (e.g. poor referencing/structure, insecure research base, etc.) and discuss the steps they can take to improve their performance in future assessments.
   - **Careers and employability:** Academic Tutors will discuss students' career ambitions and employability goals., encouraging students to work towards establishing and realising those goals whilst at Reading, including: signposting relevant opportunities (e.g. gaining work experience, careers training participation, study abroad, student societies, volunteering, etc.); helping students to identify and overcome barriers through tutor referral to specialist Careers support; and reflecting on progress made to maintain motivation and build resilience. When requested, Academic Tutors will write references for students.
   - **Engaging beyond the programme:** Academic Tutors will raise awareness of extra-curricular opportunities to encourage students to engage beyond their programme to develop transferable skills, build social networks and contribute to the development of the University (e.g. Course/School Representatives, discipline societies, STaR Mentoring, sports clubs/societies, etc.).
   - **Specialist support services:** Academic Tutors will establish proactive and effective relationships with their tutees that help to identify student support needs and refer students to specialist support services as appropriate.

4. Academic Tutors are expected to maintain regular contact with their tutees, meeting with them at least once a term (in addition to the meeting with Part 1 tutees that must take place during Welcome Week) to reflect on their academic progress and personal and professional development. Academic Tutors will liaise with other members of academic and student support staff as appropriate to support students' academic, personal and professional development, including acting as a key contact for professional services staff providing support to their tutees.

5. Academic Tutors are *not* responsible for:

   - Resolving administrative problems relating to a student's studies (e.g. timetabling, submission issues, etc.) but should direct students to the appropriate place for further guidance (e.g. Student Support Coordinator).

- Providing counselling or specialist advice but should refer students to the appropriate specialist support service on campus (e.g. Student Financial Support, International Advisory Team, Counselling and Wellbeing, Student Welfare Team, RUSU Advice Service, etc.).
- Replacing subject-specific academic staff in providing specialist academic guidance on aspects of the student's programme of study but should advise on how to get guidance, including connecting students to other academics in their field of study.

School Directors of Academic Tutoring (SDATs)

6. SDATs will provide School-level leadership for student academic, personal and professional development and maintain strategic oversight of students' engagement with studies, student success and retention across the School. An SDAT will be assigned to provide School-level leadership and direction to the Academic Tutor System including in Schools where a Director of Academic Tutoring is assigned at Department-level. SDATs will act as School-level Safeguarding Co-ordinators (See UoR Safeguarding Policy). SDATs are accountable to the Head of School for their roles and responsibilities (see *Appendix 4*). *[Except in the Henley Business School where the SDAT is accountable to the School Director of Teaching and Learning*]

7. SDATs are responsible for:
- **Strategic oversight of the Academic Tutor System within the School:** SDATs will oversee the ongoing quality management, evaluation and enhancement of the ATS in the School. SDATs will act as first contact for the ATS and ensure that the School embeds the University principles for academic tutoring. SDATs will report regularly on the progress made towards delivering the commitment to academic tutoring, including to Boards of Studies and Student Experience, School Management Boards and the DAT Community of Practice.
- **School-level leadership of initiatives to support student engagement with their studies and student development:** SDATs will oversee, monitor, facilitate and lead the School's engagement with University initiatives to support student engagement with their studies and student academic, personal and professional development (e.g. Peer Assisted Learning, University of Reading Red Award, etc.).
- **Academic leadership and decision-making in relation to student success and retention:** SDATs will undertake School-level responsibilities and make School-level decisions in relation to policy and procedures concerning extenuating circumstances, academic engagement and fitness to study/practise.
- **Support for Academic Tutors within the School:** SDATs will ensure that Academic Tutors are appropriately supported, communicating and disseminating relevant information and best practice to assist them in their roles. SDATs will promote partnership working between Academic Tutors and central support services to support student success and retention, including raising awareness of referral systems, processes and procedures.
- **Safeguarding :** SDATS will act as School-level Safeguarding Co-ordinators (See UoR Safeguarding Policy).

8. In recognition of the extent and significance of the role, the selection and appointment process for SDATs is formal, transparent and accessible, and consistent with the process for appointing other School leaders, for example School Directors of Teaching and Learning (SDTLs) or Heads of Department (*see Appendix 3*).

9. SDATs are *not* responsible for:
- Administration relating to the delivery of the Academic Tutor System (i.e. arranging Tutor/tutee meetings and recording attendance at meetings). This is the responsibility of

Academic Tutors, with help from Support Centres where required. RISIS should be used to record Tutor/tutee meetings.

- Operational oversight of the extenuating circumstances procedures and escalation processes (e.g. fitness to study), SSCs ensure students are notified of the procedures and deadlines in liaison with relevant staff and Committees.
- Ensuring support is in place for students suspending, withdrawing or transferring. This is the responsibility of SSCs.
- Providing ongoing pastoral support to students experiencing welfare or wellbeing issues affecting their studies. This is the responsibility of specialist student support teams including the Student Welfare Team, Counselling and Wellbeing, and the Disability Advisory Service.

Reporting

10. SDATS will provide termly updates on the ATS to their Boards of Studies and Student Experience and School Management Boards , including on the provision of academic, personal and professional development across the School and flagging any particular successes, challenges and emerging risks to that provision.

11. Heads of School and School Directors of Teaching and Learning may provide updates on the ATS in their School Teaching Enhancement Action Plans (STEAPs) where appropriate.

Heads of School

12. Each Head of School has ultimate responsibility for ensuring an excellent student experience of academic tutoring in their School. Although in practice this is delivered by SDATs and Academic Tutors, the Head of School (SDTL in the Henley Business School) must work with the SDAT and School Director of Teaching and Learning (SDTL) to report on progress towards enhancing the student learning experience, including embedding the ATS, through, for example, discussions in meetings of the School Management Board.

13. Heads of School must ensure that an appropriate time allocation is made for Academic Tutors and SDATs (see *Appendix 3*) when considering workload models.

Students

14. Students are active partners in their learning and development at the University of Reading. Students work in partnership with their Academic Tutor to support their academic, personal and professional development. The online Student Academic Tutor Toolkit provides guidance for students on how to work with their Academic Tutor. The Student Charter provides a helpful summary of the expectations staff have of students at Reading. The list below captures those most relevant to academic tutoring. The University expects students to:
- Work hard at their studies and to be active partners in shaping their experience of Higher Education.
- Seek out opportunities to enhance their understanding and to develop practical and intellectual skill.
- Take advantage of the wealth of activities (social and developmental) provided by the University and Reading University Students' Union (RUSU).
- Be pro-active in managing their learning and in seeking help when needed.
- Keep appointments and to communicate with staff in a timely and courteous manner.

Partnership

The foundation of our academic community

15. The following principles underpin student-staff partnership at Reading
Partnership:

- Is based on values of trust and respect

- Is empowering and inclusive

- Enables the collaborative development of meaningful change

- Creates a sense of belonging to an academic community

Support for Schools and students

Welfare support for the ATS

16. The Student Welfare Team are responsible for providing specialist advice, guidance and signposting for students who are experiencing a level of personal difficulties outside study that may have a significant impact on their studies if not supported. Students should be referred to the Team when they need practical guidance relating to a specific incident or problem.

17. The Student Welfare Team, managed by the Student Welfare Manager, are located centrally in Student Services in the Carrington Building and are dedicated to working with students in particular Schools, working closely with SDATs, Academic Tutors and SSCs to monitor and track students receiving their support. Academic Tutors may refer students to Student Welfare Officers directly for pastoral/welfare support.

18. Student Welfare Officers are responsible for:
    - Providing specialist advice, guidance and signposting for students who are experiencing a level of personal difficulties outside study that may have a significant impact on their studies if not supported, e.g.
        - severe home-sickness,
        - friendship/house-mate conflicts,
        - family crisis/conflict,
        - bullying/harassment,
        - concern about a friend,
        - problems settling in,
        - victim of crime,
        - domestic violence,
        - substance abuse,
        - struggle with caring responsibilities,
        - concerns relating to radicalisation, exploitation (Prevent), or safeguarding.

    - Working in partnership with academic and professional services colleagues, to establish reasonable and effective methods of support or adjustments for students in situations of difficulty or with complex or unusual circumstances.
    - Making referrals/signposting students to other specialist services within the University/Students' Union, support groups, external agencies and treatment providers where necessary.
    - Undertaking individual case work to limit the impact a problem could have on a student's studies as well as supporting the administrative dimension of student welfare support.

- Investigating 'notifications of concern' and considering concerns raised through University Prevent[3], safeguarding and harassment policies.

19. Student Welfare Officers are **not** responsible for providing:
    - An 'emergency service', but the Student Welfare Team will operate a 'drop - in' service during the working day to provide a key contact for enquiries. Otherwise, Student Welfare Officers will use an appointment system to meet and follow-up with students receiving their support.
    - Counselling and specialist mental health support. This is the responsibility of the Counselling and Wellbeing Service.
    - Advice on disability to either students or staff. This is the responsibility of the Disability Advisory Service.
    - 'Care' for students, such as that which should be provided by Social Services, a carer, a mentor, a relative or a non-medical helper.
    - Specialist practitioner support or clinically qualified treatment.

Centre for Quality Support and Development (CQSD) support for the ATS

20. CQSD provides support to SDATs and Academic Tutors, and is responsible for identifying and sharing best practice, delivering training and developing helpful resources/support materials (e.g. Academic Tutor Toolkit).

21. Working with Schools and Functions, CQSD will coordinate the evaluation of the ATS, providing evidence of impact on student engagement, success and retention and staff engagement, workload and recognition as well as identifying opportunities to make improvements on an ongoing basis.

Administrative support

22. Academic Tutors should develop strong relationships with student-facing staff in the Support Centres, Henley Helpdesk and the ISLI Administration Office to ensure the effective communications that they and students need for processes to work smoothly. These staff will work closely with Academic Tutors and SDATs, escalating issues as appropriate and providing administrative support. They provide advice and guidance to students and staff on the administrative process relating to students and their studies. They manage the key processes, including:
    - Extenuating circumstances requests including providing support to the University Standing Committee on Special Cases.
    - Module selection and registration.
    - Changes to students' status, for example, suspensions, withdrawals, programme transfers, changes to mode of study.
    - Support for SDTL/SDAT with extenuating circumstances, student academic engagement, academic misconduct and fitness to study and fitness to practise cases.
    - Welcome Week activities in Schools.
    - Communication with students using Essentials and Me@Reading student portal.

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[3] The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 places an obligation on the University to "in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism". This is known as the Prevent duty. The University has prepared a Prevent Policy Statement containing a process for reporting concerns relating to Prevent, which you can read here.

Professor Orla Kennedy, Teaching and Learning Dean and Academic Lead for the ATS

(Revised 28 September 2020)

Version	Keeper	To be reviewed	Approved by	Approval Date	Effective From
3	CQSD - ADE	Two-yearly	UBTLSE	6 October 2020	October 2020