

## **SECTION 33: THE ROLE OF THE COURSE TUTOR**

Each trainee is assigned a Course Tutor. The tutor's role is holistic: to support trainees across all the domains of the Course - on academic, clinical and research matters, and to monitor and support their personal and professional development.

The tutor's role is critical. It should be a primary source of support for trainees, enabling the Course to monitor their progress and their welfare, and to respond appropriately if any concerns arise. While many of these concerns will be relatively easy to resolve, on occasion tutors need to support trainees through more serious problems (for example, major life events), and ensure that the Course meets its duty of care to trainees by supporting them in an appropriate and timely manner.

The Course expects trainees to maintain regular contact with their tutor, and it is part of the tutor's duties to monitor this, and also to ensure that they make themselves available to trainees.

### **Course Tutor Duties**

#### **Monitoring trainee progress**

In order to carry out their duties tutors need to make sure that they are fully apprised of their tutees progress in all domains. This means that they should read relevant supervisor and trainee feedback forms for each placement, ensure that they have reviewed MPR reports if they are not the placement visitor, and have checked the academic marksheet database to track progress with case reports and exams. It is especially important to do all of this prior to any meetings with the trainee.

#### **Meetings between tutor and trainee**

##### **a) Timetabled meetings**

Timing: Each term there are one or two timetabled lunchtimes when trainees meet with their tutors. Course Tutors are expected to keep these times free in their diaries and arrange for their tutees to see them at a specific time (usually by email). A minimum of 20 minutes should be set aside for each trainee.

If the tutor knows they will not be available for the timetabled tutor slots they should alert their tutees and arrange an alternative time; they should also ensure that the alternative time is as close as possible to the timetabled slot.

If the tutor's unavailability is unpredictable (for example, because they are unwell) they should attempt to reschedule the meetings as quickly as is practicable.

If it is clear that the time set aside is not sufficient then the tutor should make arrangements to see the trainee at another time.

Content: The aim of the meeting is to discuss and reflect on the trainee's progression in all relevant domains of the course – academic, clinical, research and personal/professional development). If the trainee has current concerns these should also be picked up, discussed and managed appropriately.

Sometimes both trainees and tutors misunderstand the purpose of these meetings as 'troubleshooting'. This is an inappropriately narrow conception, largely because if things are going well there can be a temptation to assume that nothing needs discussing. Tutors are advised specifically and actively to enquire into progress in all domains, and to encourage trainees to talk as openly as possible.

Trainee non-attendance: If trainees do not attend for a scheduled tutor slot the tutor should contact them and ascertain the reasons for absence. Although it is the tutees responsibly to attend the meetings, it is also the tutor's duty of care to ensure that there is continuity of contact.

### **b) Developmental Reviews**

The procedure for development reviews is detailed elsewhere. Essentially these are timetabled to take place at the start of the autumn term for both second and third year trainees. There is a template which needs to be completed by trainee and by the tutor, and the review should use this as the basis for an extended discussion. It is unhelpful to treat the review as a 'tick-box' – the review should be a chance for tutee and tutor to reflect on the progress the trainee has made to date and the objectives which should be held in mind for the coming year. To do this properly there should be an adequate amount of time set aside to do this – usually 40-45 minutes.

### **c) "Ad hoc" meetings**

There is a risk that trainees and tutors restrict contact only to the designated slots. Although this will be sufficient for many trainees, it is important explicitly to let trainees know that they can contact the tutor at any time should there be matters which need discussing. This contact can be via phone or email – trainees should be clear that they do not have to wait until they are in college to contact their tutor in order to arrange a time to meet.

## **Responding to trainee problems**

If trainees indicate that they are experiencing difficulties in any area of the course the tutor will need to consider how the problem is best managed, and to support this process. Usually some joint problem-solving between trainee and tutor is sufficient. Clearly there may be times when it is helpful to involve another member of staff (as below), but it is important to

bear in mind that the role of the course tutor is holistic, and it is best to attempt to resolve issues without recourse to colleagues - there is an expectation that tutors are familiar with all aspects of course procedure. Hence a query about service related research does not automatically need to be passed to an academic colleague, just as a query about placement procedures does not automatically need to be answered by a clinical tutor.

### **Management of issues and events which adversely impact on trainee progression**

From time to time issues emerge which will seriously impact on trainee progression. For example, it is fairly straightforward to identify a plan which accommodates to short periods of illness which result in trainees being unable to submit specific course assignments on schedule. However, longer periods of illness might make it difficult for a trainee to complete a placement, and there may be more serious implications both for the training and for the support the individual requires to complete training. When serious threats to trainee progression emerge Course Tutors will usually need to consult with senior colleagues or the course directors in order to identify not only the support which should be offered to trainees, but also for help planning any formal responses required by the course, especially where there is any question of varying course procedures to accommodate an individual's circumstances. Critically, such decisions are usually ones which the tutor themselves is not empowered to make, and hence there must be discussion or formal communications with the members of staff to whom authority is delegated. Broadly speaking, this means:

- 1) Problems that impact on academic regulations:** for example, requests for a significant variation in assessment deadlines, changes to assessment procedures, problems which could lead to course failure or potential disciplinary issues. All of these would need to be raised with the Chair of the Board of Examiners. The tutor themselves needs to take care not to act on behalf of the Chair unless clearly authorised to do so
  
- 2) Problems that relate to terms and conditions of employment:** for example, where a trainee is seriously ill and may need temporarily to withdraw from the programme, or trainees who are returning from maternity leave and requesting variations on the usual pattern of work. Such issues would need to be discussed with the Clinical Joint Course Director, who acts as the trainees' line manager on behalf of their employing Trust.

### **Granting extensions to course work**

Under exceptional circumstances, an extension to the date by which work must be handed in can be negotiated. This should be requested in advance by discussion with the Course Tutor.

The usual grounds for an extension would be serious illness or major life-events - extensions are not granted because of pressure of work or minor ailments. Cases will also be considered when problems arise on the placement that are beyond the trainee's control and make it impossible to submit the case report in time to meet the deadline. Late claims

for extenuating circumstances will be considered where the reasons for mitigation themselves prevented submission of the claim in advance.

It is critical that any requests for extensions are accompanied by appropriate forms of evidence that make clear how the circumstances in question relate to the request for extension. In most cases this will involve medical evidence (e.g., a doctor's letter), which sets out the relevant medical condition, and describes how it has impacted on the trainee's ability to complete the relevant work on time. When an extension is requested because of practical barriers occurring on placement, a signed letter from the supervisor will normally be required.

**Extensions up to one week:**

These are negotiated through discussion with the Course Tutor, who will then notify the Chair of the Board of Examiners, setting out:

- a) the new submission date
- b) the reasons for this request (usually a circumstance beyond the trainee's control, such as illness or significant life events).

Once they have heard back from the Chair the tutor will email the trainee to advise them of the new submission date (it is not sufficient to do this verbally, as there needs to be evidence that the trainee has been given the new submission date

**Extensions longer than one week:**

Trainees need to make the request in writing using the Extenuating Circumstances form (downloaded from the 'useful forms' section of the course website). Requests for longer extensions are also negotiated with the Course Tutor, but the Tutor needs to pass the request to the Chair of the Board of Examiners.

For cases where the circumstances are related to practical matters on placement, the Chair of the Board will notify the trainee directly of the decision. For cases involving medical or personal circumstances, the Chair will pass the Extenuating Circumstances Form, along with relevant medical evidence, to the Faculty Extenuating Circumstances panel for review. The panel will notify the trainee of their decision.

## **Interruption of study**

If a trainee needs to interrupt their study they need to discuss this with their tutor and relevant information needs to be passed to the Chair of the Exam Board in a timely manner. The most common reasons for interruptions are maternity leave or serious illness.

**Informing the course:** Because an interruption of study constitutes an employment issue, trainees should be asked to contact the Clinical Joint Course Director (who will ensure that there is appropriate liaison with the employing Trust).

**Informing Registry:** Tutors must complete the interruption of study form with the trainee. This is a critical procedure; failure to complete this form can cause significant complications

for the trainee and for the Course (because the period of study for the Doctorate is fixed at 3 years).

The form is downloadable from the staff intranet. Once completed it should be passed to the Chair of the Exam Board and the Senior Course Administrator (who will ensure that the trainee is interrupted from their studies through Student Records).