



## Guidance for Personal Tutors

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### **1) Role specification and responsibilities**

Reporting to the Divisional tutor, the UCLMS personal tutor will undertake the role of personal tutor to students for up to three years of the MBBS programme (in years 1-2, in year 3 or in years 4-6). They will undertake this role in accordance with the UCL Personal Tutor Strategy and this additional guidance from the Medical School.

#### ***Personal Specification:***

- Committed to the process and to providing the best possible support to MBBS students at UCL
- A good communicator able to develop a supportive relationship with students
- Accessible in terms of geography, capacity and outlook

#### ***Roles and responsibilities:***

- To provide students and the student support system with a reliable channel of communication
- To undertake the recommended number of personal tutor meetings and contacts with allocated tutees
- To use these contacts to:
  - support students in their study skills,
  - review their education progress and achievement,
  - monitor and record generic skills acquisition,
  - monitor engagement with the programme including completion of the portfolio
  - provide pastoral support and where necessary to refer the student to additional sources of support and guidance
- To produce a report of each contact in Years 4-6 that is recorded securely in the student NHS Eportfolio

- To report to the Student Support system any issues that may affect student progress that the tutor and student agree should be shared
- To report to the Student Support system any issues that may affect student safety, the safety of others or where the students fitness to practise may be called into question
- To provide suitable brief, written handover of students to subsequent personal tutors
- To attend to individual development needs as a personal tutor including attendance at training events/completion of online training as necessary

## **2) Some general guidance:**

- Contacts between personal tutors and tutees may be made via meetings, email or phone according to each tutee's preference
- One to one meetings should last about 10-15 minutes and group meetings 30-60 minutes. All contacts should include a review of progress, relevant career or pastoral advice and any specific areas you may have highlighted for discussion from previous contacts. Students should be invited to raise any concerns.
- In Years 1-3, students are advised to keep evidence of their personal tutor contacts in their portfolios. In Years 4-6, a report should be completed in the student's EPortfolio and tutors are advised to keep a copy. The tutor is representing the Medical School at the same time as trying to provide help and support. It is usual for issues raised through contacts to be included in the report form, but this must be by mutual agreement except where fitness to practise or danger to self or others is concerned, in which case students should not be notified that a report is being made. The tutors' reports may be important to the School in determining issues of progression and in considering in-course performance at Examiners' meetings. If the tutor feels unable to deal with issues raised he/she has the option to refer the student for further advice to the Student Support clinics. In year 1 and 2 the contact email is [medsch.student-support@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:medsch.student-support@ucl.ac.uk) in years 4-6 it is completed in the EPortfolio and gets automatically logged there.
- Keep in touch with all your tutees. Don't assume that seemingly confident and successful students are problem-free. Even if they are, they'll benefit from and appreciate your support and interest in their progress
- Keep your relationship with your tutees professional: there's a difference between being friendly and befriending a student. Don't socialise with particular students or become caught up in their problems. Don't lend money or offer temporary accommodation
- Give students your undivided attention in personal tutorials: don't allow interruptions
- Make a record of each discussion you have with one of your tutees: it will serve as an aide-memoire for the next time you meet and might provide information that could be used in a reference or some other supportive statement you are called upon to write for the student. It is also a course requirement for students to complete the personal tutor meeting section of their portfolio. You may need to keep an additional private record of issues you both feel are not suitable to commit to the portfolio.
- Regard all conversations and contacts with individual tutees as confidential: don't discuss their problems with anyone else without their permission. This includes parents. However it is important to stress to students that this confidentiality is conditional. If there are issues where the student, other students, members of the public or particularly patients are being put at risk, your duty to report this information to the divisional tutor overrides this duty of confidentiality
- Don't expect students to tell you everything, or accept all that they say at face value. Remember that there are two sides to a dispute: check complaints to get the full picture
- Accept that you'll sometimes make mistakes. Personal tutoring is a learning experience and even experienced tutors meet new situations that test their judgment and expertise
- Expect to be asked for a reference at some point. Encourage students to provide you with an up to date CV and details of their academic progress so far with any request

### **3) Further training and support**

The Medical School provides an online training course for new (and old) personal tutors at the beginning of each new academic year. The UCL Staff Development and Training Unit runs occasional workshops on Personal Tutoring which cover all the basic aspects of the role: all tutors are encouraged to attend one of these workshops. Further advice and support on individual student issues can also be given by members of the Student Support Team or the Divisional Tutor. The initial points of contact for personal tutors and student support are [medsch.ptutors1-6@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:medsch.ptutors1-6@ucl.ac.uk)

### **4) Writing personal references and sample references**

Students often ask their personal tutor for a reference. This may be for a summer job, for financial assistance, for their iBSc application or for their elective placement. Guidance and sample wording follow.

**When providing a personal reference, please include the following statement:**

***'I am (students name) personal tutor. I have been (name) personal tutor for (amount) months/years.***

***The minimum requirement to meet with (name) is once a term, however should (name) require additional support and advice a meeting can be requested.***

**It is UCL Policy to end references with the following:**

***'In accordance with UCL's normal practice, this reference is given in good faith and in confidence, without legal liability on behalf of the author or UCL.'***

**Please be aware that:**

Tutors cannot divulge specific health difficulties/disabilities in a reference without permission from the tutee.

If you feel ill equipped to comment use the phrase 'to the best of my knowledge' as a preface to statements about whether x is for example honest, trustworthy, etc.

It is recommended that students provide you with a CV so you are aware of their background and interests (if not, and the information is important to the reference then it should be requested from the student)

Students should only receive hard copies of references, or secure password-protected read-only versions to prevent any electronic amendments being made.

## Sample References

**Dear Sir/Madam,**

I am pleased to provide an academic reference in support of [ ]'s application for an elective placement at your institution. I can confirm that [ ] is registered with UCL as a medical student, is expected to graduate with the degrees MBBS in July [ ] and is in good standing with the school.

[ ] is a very good student who has passed all of his/her exams at the first attempt. In Y1 and Y2 s/he came high up in our 4<sup>th</sup> decile (of 330 students) and obtained a very good 2:1 in his/her intercalated BSc (Subject) in Year 3. S/he passed his/her first clinical year comfortably (4th decile of 380 students) with a result that placed him/her near the middle of a very able year group.

S/he has demonstrated good clinical skills and professionalism, is able to work individually and as part of a team and interacts well with patients, staff and fellow students. In my opinion, s/he has the attributes to make the most of his/her elective placement and I am pleased to be able to recommend him/her to you.

Comments from her clinical teachers have been uniformly positive, with his/her particular strengths being excellent interpersonal and communication skills and good organisation. S/he is punctual, polite and friendly, with a good knowledge base and I have no doubt that she will make the most of the opportunities that a placement in [ ] would provide. I am able to thoroughly recommend her to you.

[ ] is an excellent student who has passed all of his/her exams at the first attempt. S/he did well in Y1 and Y2, with good passes towards the middle of the year group (330), but really came into his/her own with her clinical studies. S/he obtained a well-deserved Merit in Y4 (the first clinical year, top 20% of 380 students) and came in the third decile for Y5. His/her final year studies are going extremely well and I was particularly impressed by the report from [ ] which was truly outstanding.

[ ] will make an excellent doctor and my only concern is that s/he has struggled with financial pressures throughout. We have supported her as much as we are able with our limited resources and I am certain that a degree of financial security for the remainder of the course will allow him/her to demonstrate his/her full potential in his/her final exams. I can recommend him/her to you without hesitation.

## **5) Writing Foundation School (FPAS) references**

In the later years, personal tutors provide a reference for Foundation School (UKFPO) applications on behalf of the Medical School. These references are brief, online ‘tick box’ style forms requiring a general knowledge of ability based on knowledge of their progress, portfolio, results and personal and professional attributes. Students need to ensure that you can access this information and should be asked to provide you with an up to date CV if this is not easily accessible in their portfolio. Any student who has Fitness to Practise or other issues will have been pre-allocated to the Divisional Tutor or a Medical Student Support Tutor and you will be informed if this is the case for one of your tutees. Sometimes FPAS applications ask for information about a student’s clinical abilities. As personal tutor you are unlikely to be able to answer this sort of question. Simply make this clear on any reference.

## **6) Logistics and FAQs**

### **1) *How do I know who my tutees are and how do I contact them?***

This information will be provided by the MBBS Personal Tutor Team at [medsch.personaltutors1-6@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:medsch.personaltutors1-6@ucl.ac.uk). It will be provided at the beginning of term 1 as soon as the names and contact details of joining or returning students are known. Tutors will be provided with the name of the student, their year of study and their email contact details. All students are asked to check their e-mail daily and so email is usually the best form of communication

### **2) *When are when do I meet with my tutees?***

Most tutors meet with their students in a mixture of group sessions and one to one sessions. Usually tutors meet their students in their office or another similar venue. The students will be expected to travel to you. If your office is in an area not usually accessed by students they may need directions and for you to check they can access the venue. The personal tutor guidance indicates how often you should meet or make contact and advises when in the year this would be most productive for students. If you can, meeting where you or the student can access their portfolio really helps.

### **3) *What happens if one of my students fails?***

Some students fail some things. This is not unexpected. They may ask your advice when they fail or are getting low scores. In these situations you should help your student to set some objectives for improvement. It is always a good idea to suggest they attend a student support clinic for tailored help or speak to the relevant module or year lead. Significant failure at summative examinations will be identified separately by the School and appropriate interviews arranged with the student support service will be initiated. You will be informed if this happens to one of your tutees. Where students do not progress to the next year of study it will be normal practice for tutors to continue to provide personal tutor support to that student until they successfully progress or leave the programme. These students will usually be put on ‘close supervision’ with a member of the student support team seeing them regularly. As their personal tutor, they will keep you abreast of developments.

**4) *What happens if one of my students is having problems?***

For most of the time, the majority of medical students cope well with the demands of university life and the MBBS programme. However, there are inevitably periods when the going gets tough for some, when they get themselves into difficulties or encounter situations that undermine their confidence and capabilities. UCL and the Medical School provide an **extensive range of advisers and student support services** to assist students with academic, personal and practical problems and the personal tutor is an important part of this overall support system. The most important first step is to direct them to the student support service. You may like also like to contact student support to ensure your student accesses the help they need. In years 4-6 you will see that there is an automatic function within the report form that triggers an alert to student support to arrange a meeting for the student.

**5) *What happens when the students change personal tutor?***

The MBBS programme is six years long with changing needs in the later years. Students therefore have one tutor for years 1 and 2 and then handover to a year 3 tutor<sup>[1]</sup>while they complete the integrated BSc, whilst maintaining reduced contact with their original tutor. The year 3 tutor hands over to a new tutor who looks after the student for years 4-6. Year 3 tutors are asked to report any specific issues or concerns from the early years which may need support to ensure continuity. Where the student has identified significant problems, the student support service is able to provide additional handover information.

**6) *Can I give up or transfer my students to another tutor?***

Only in exceptional circumstances, for example if you leave UCL, change jobs or go on extended leave. Good personal tutoring is about relationships and it is best for tutor and tutee to have continuity. Where continuity cannot be guaranteed, you should contact the Personal Tutor team as soon as you become aware of this.

**7) *How do I access the Eportfolio/the personal tutor report forms?***

In years 4-6 students maintain an e-portfolio on the NES platform (the platform used for the Foundation Programme Portfolio). You should be allocated as a tutor on your students' portfolio and be able to read all parts of the portfolio. Again if you have difficulty in accessing these documents you should contact [medsch.personaltutors1-6@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:medsch.personaltutors1-6@ucl.ac.uk) in the first instance. Where you have difficulty in accessing the NES portfolio because of your role at UCL you should ask them to bring along a printed version of the relevant documents to you. The personal tutor report forms again form part of the student portfolio and are available on the student's NES portfolio.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Graduates move straight into year 4

8) ***What if I don't want a student to see what I am going to write on the personal tutor form?***

Following each meeting the student and tutor should agree on the content of the report form unless there is a concern about Fitness to Practise in which case the divisional tutor should be informed.

9) ***What should I do if there is a serious and urgent problem?***

The student support clinic system operates daily and the divisional tutor is responsible for the welfare of students enrolled on the programme. If you have a serious concern contact [medsch.student-support@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:medsch.student-support@ucl.ac.uk) in the first instance.

10) ***How does all this hard work get recognised in my job plan or appraisal?***

Being a personal tutor is a responsible role. If you are an academic you should inform your line manager that you undertake this key role and ensure your workload allocation takes this role into account. If you are an NHS clinician, it is important to note that this activity attracts both student load and national undergraduate tariff credit per Personal Tutor.

11) ***Do I get paid for this role.***

There is no personal monetary reward for acting as a personal tutor but there is a monetary reward to your division or Trust as follows  
0.05FTE of Load is credited to UCL divisions for PTs – decided on by Fac Managers  
0.075FTE worth of SIFT is paid to Trusts – fixed to avoid fluctuation year on year.