

ROYAL HOLLOWAY
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

PERSONAL ADVISOR'S GUIDE 2016

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1. College guidelines on departmental support for students in the form of Academic or Personal Advisors

Departments are expected to provide support to their students in two ways: firstly, by giving advice on academic issues such as the choice of courses or on personal development planning and secondly, by being available to students who are experiencing personal problems which are interfering with their academic work and by directing them to the appropriate College support, for example the counselling service, Health Centre or another wellbeing service.

The differing demands of academic disciplines mean that Personal Advisor systems may differ from department to department, but the following minimum provision is required of all departments:

- All students should be allocated a Personal Advisor; when a Personal Advisor goes on leave, the department should allocate an alternative Personal Advisor;
- For students taking Joint and Combined Honours degrees, there should be a Personal Advisor in each department with responsibility for liaison between the two departments concerning any difficulties experienced by the student;
- For continuing students, an opportunity for discussion should be provided at least once a term, but the responsibility for meeting their advisor rests with the student;
- New students, or UG students directly entering in the second year, should be invited to meet their Personal Advisor in the first term. This could form part of a more structured introduction to the department. In the first term Advisors should take a pro-active approach to contacting their advisees;
- Staff should publish office hours when they are available to see advisees;
- Departmental processes for monitoring student attendance, submission of work and progress more generally, and the issuing of formal warnings where necessary, should include input from Personal Advisors.

2. The role of the Personal Advisor

The precise role of the Academic or Personal Advisor will vary from department to department. If you are new to the College, or new to advising, it is therefore recommended that you consult with colleagues as to the exact nature of the duties you will be expected to fulfil. Personal Advisors will normally be required to undertake the following activities:

- Maintaining regular contact with advisees, in person and by e-mail;
- Providing basic pastoral support to advisees;
- Supporting advisees in personal, academic and career development planning, and signposting specialist staff who can provide guidance;
- Following up on advisees who are not making satisfactory progress or who have poor attendance records;

- Liaising with other members of academic staff involved in the teaching of advisees;
- Liaising with members of the Disability and Dyslexia Services (formerly, Educational Support Office) network about provision for students with special needs, including disabilities, Specific Learning Difficulties, or ongoing personal issues which impact on studying;
- Maintaining awareness of other sources of support within College;
- Writing references for current and former advisees.

This handbook is not designed to be a substitute for information provided by the various College services, but rather to offer a general overview of the tasks and challenges commonly facing Personal Advisors, together with some practical suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the role.

3. First meetings

Introductory meetings with new students should be planned in advance. Ideally, the first such meeting should be programmed into welcome week. Try to arrange to see new advisees briefly as a group during welcome week. When you do so, it is worth structuring the discussion to help the group explore any questions or anxieties they may have. You might ask the students to talk in pairs for a few minutes about their expectations of the programme, and together make a list of any questions about the course or about starting university. You could also ask them to recall previous experiences of transitions (such as going to secondary school) and the kinds of strategies that were most successful in helping them to settle in.

Answer any direct questions about the programme, but remember that they may already be feeling overwhelmed with information, so don't overdo it.

If a group session cannot be scheduled, then send a welcome note or e-mail to each one of your advisees, introducing yourself and inviting them to come and see you individually. Give details of where and when they can find you, and whether you are offering 'drop-in' slots, or whether and how they can sign up for an appointment.

The first meeting with a new advisee is crucial as it sets the tone for the future conduct of the relationship. Some open-ended questions which may serve as a starting-point include:

- Tell me something about yourself;
- How do you feel about being here?
- How does the college differ from your school?
- What do you expect from your experience here?
- What kind of extra-curricular activities do you expect to become involved with?
- Is there anything that you are anxious about with respect to being a student?

(If a student is anxious about any aspect it might be helpful to ask them what personal resources they have which have helped them in the past.)

A first meeting can also be invaluable if you are supervising a student registered with the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS). You should meet with the student concerned individually and go through the support detailed in the support memo that the DDS Network Member would have received from the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS). You should discuss the student's expectations, clarify the provision offered and raise any potential problem with the Network Member of the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS) directly. You can also offer practical advice such as encouraging all students registered with DDS to make themselves known to their individual lecturers. Equally, if an individual meeting with students registered with DDS cannot be scheduled in the first week, then a welcome note/email- should be sent to them.

It is also important to clarify the purpose of meetings or tutorials with advisees, in order to set some ground-rules about availability and confidentiality, and to remind students that you are there to offer support for their overall academic and personal development.

However, beware of saying, 'If you have any problems, come and see me'. It sounds helpful but can imply that problems are the only passport to a meeting. You should also bear in mind that different individuals will interpret 'problems' differently. To a student who is dependent on others for support and guidance in all matters, a trivial issue can be a problem. Another, who has learned to be independent and proud, would need to be in a desperate situation before they would describe themselves as having a problem.

4. Subsequent meetings

The College guidelines state that new students should be provided with several opportunities for discussion with their Personal Advisor, particularly during the first term, and that Personal Advisors should take a pro-active approach to contacting them. It is therefore very important that you schedule meetings with all new advisees (whether alone or in groups) and that you follow up any non-attendance at these meetings. Research into retention has shown that an early appointment for an informal conversation about how students are settling in will help them make the transition to university more effectively and will help them identify any issues/concerns before these reach crisis point.

For continuing students, an opportunity for discussion should be scheduled at least once a term. Although there are arguments in favour of leaving students entirely free to decide whether to attend or not, the disadvantage is that those in greatest need of support or review may fall through the net.

Another advantage of scheduling and promoting periodic progress reviews is that both the Personal Advisor and the student can prepare in advance. Where practical, you can ensure that you have copies of the student's

most recent assessment results, attendance records, etc, and the student can be encouraged to identify recent successes and areas for improvement, to help focus the discussion. A Personal Development Record (see section 12) or equivalent is likely to provide a useful focus and framework for these regular reviews.

Inevitably, there will be key times in the academic year when many students are facing common issues, such as preparation for examinations, and it may be worth arranging an extra group session rather than dealing with queries on an individual basis, and being aware of the support offered in the College.

Whatever your departmental policy on scheduled meetings, some students will also wish to see you at other times, and College guidelines state that all Personal Advisors should publish office hours when they are available for consultation. In most departments, these office hours are advertised and kept once or twice a week; in others, staff will arrange timely appointments through email bookings.

Both of these approaches have benefits and drawbacks. What is important, in either case, is to ensure that students feel cared for as individuals without undermining their sense of personal responsibility. What is equally important is to ensure that your own entitlement to a realistic and manageable workload is not eroded.

One of the most important aspects of the role of the Personal Advisor, therefore, is to be clear about practical and psychological boundaries. Although there is a duty of care, it is not your job to try to 'solve' all an advisee's problems, nor are you *in loco parentis*. You should be guided by the principle that the primary aim of a Personal Advisor is to support advisees in their studies, and the goal of the pastoral care that the Personal Advisor provides is to help students resolve any personal difficulties that are adversely affecting academic progress. You should also bear in mind that it is not always possible to do this.

Most academic staff contracts require members of staff to become Personal Advisors and to work such hours as are necessary to carry out the tasks associated with the post. The nature of the relationship between a Personal Advisor and the advisees can mean that the Personal Advisor is in some senses never 'off duty', and can be expected to respond to urgent student problems at any reasonable time. This does not mean that you have to be accessible twenty-four hours a day. In practice, you are unlikely to go far wrong if advisees are:

- made aware of routine times when you are in your office;
- confident that they can contact you at other times by e-mail or (if more appropriate) office telephone;
- notified of arrangements for cover during periods when you are absent;
- informed of other services available in the College which back up the Personal Advisory system and how to access them in case of emergency, especially 'out of hours' (see section 15).

5. Listening and advisory skills

The setting for an advisory meeting can have a considerable effect on its conduct and outcome. A student is more likely to feel valued and trusting if the space in which the meeting takes place is protected from interruptions at the door or by telephone. As a bare minimum, you should ensure that the door is properly closed; placing a 'Do Not Disturb' sign on it and switching the telephone to 'call divert' mode conveys greater confidentiality and respect. Two chairs of equal height, at an oblique angle to each other, without the obstruction of a desk or plant will further the cause of putting the student at ease. Sitting behind a desk or on chairs of unequal height creates a power relationship that is likely to inhibit self-disclosure.

Some institutions have introduced policies to restrict one-to-one meetings, to avoid accusations of impropriety on either side. At Royal Holloway, this is not usually considered necessary, but you may wish to take a few sensible precautions against potential accusations, including:

- scheduling meetings only during the working week and in formal settings;
- trying to keep meetings to a time when adjoining offices are occupied;
- keeping proper records of meetings;
- preventing students from over-extending meetings or arranging an excessive number of meetings.

If you do develop concerns about a particular situation, discuss them with colleagues and identify practical solutions. For instance you could use a room with a glass panel in or next to the door, or arrange for another member of staff to remain nearby. Unless a student is obviously distressed, it is useful to begin a meeting by spending a few minutes jointly setting an informal agenda. It's equally important to allow them enough time to explore the issues, whether academic or personal, for themselves and develop their own ideas about what to do.

Two of the most important skills needed for Personal Advisor-advisee meetings are listening and questioning. The difficulty is that if you see yourself exclusively or primarily as a source of information and advice, you may be tempted to jump in too soon and just tell the student how you think they should act. Try to avoid this. Instead, attend closely to words and body language, and hold back comments or questions until the student has had time to say what is on their mind.

After they've finished speaking, it can be helpful to reflect back what you think they've said, to reassure them that you have been listening attentively and to allow them to correct any misunderstandings. This is particularly important if the student's first language is not English. You might also ask one or two questions to open up the discussion and assist them in clarifying the underlying issues. Examples might include:

- How is the programme/course going?
- How do you get on with the other students?
- How do you feel about what is happening?
- What are the options for you?
- Tell me more about...
- What would need to happen to make you feel better about...?
- What would you like to change?

Although 'why' questions are open-ended it is wise to use them sparingly because they can be interpreted as persecutory.

Towards the end of the discussion, it can be helpful to agree jointly to some realistic action points and, if appropriate, a time for a further meeting to follow up on progress. Again, with non-native speakers of English it is worth asking them to explain or summarise in their own words what has been agreed to make sure that the important points have been understood. It is not uncommon for students who do not have a strong grasp of English to say that they have understood when in fact they have not.

6. Coping with confrontation

Some advisees may have genuine problems with taking responsibility, and Personal Advisors should be clear about the gradually escalating confrontations that can result from these problems. Other advisees may remain impervious to 'ordinary' feedback and need to be confronted quite bluntly with reality. In both cases, some of the following ideas may be helpful:

- *Check the facts*

"Emma, your Politics lecturer tells me you were unacceptably rude in the last session. I would like to know your version of events". In an instance where decisions may be appealed against, check with the College Secretary's Office, or Faculty Assistant Registrar in relation to academic issues, and make sure procedures are followed to the letter. If necessary, consult others about the correct procedures.

- *Stick with the facts*

Do not get involved in arguments. As a Personal Advisor you do not have to justify decisions taken by committees, boards, etc. Your job as a representative of your department and of the College is simply to explain in so far as you are able, and not to defend.

- *Continue to stick with the facts*

Where a decision has been taken to suspend a student, or require withdrawal, be firm and clear. Advisees should be informed of the appeal procedures outlined in the relevant Academic Regulations, told whether in the Personal Advisor's view there are any grounds for appeal, and told

whether an appeal has any realistic chance of success. Students can refer to the Students' Union for advice. You may want to seek advice from a Faculty Assistant Registrar. They should be encouraged to take a week getting over their anger and disappointment, and to consult other people, before taking any decision to appeal, while being aware of the deadline for submission of an appeal.

- *Write down the facts*

Documenting such decisions and conversations is important and notes should be written up at the time; some record of the meeting should be included in your files. It is often helpful to follow up with a letter or e-mail to the student summarizing what has been said.

7. Common concerns

Apart from improving your advisory 'technique', it is helpful to think about the kinds of issues that students are likely to present. These fall into a number of basic categories.

Problems with academic work might include:

- Worries about programme choice. It is very common for new students to wonder whether they are on the right programme. This may be overcome as they settle down gradually, or with the assistance of a specialist advisor at the Careers Service, to whom you could refer them. However, student concern about programme choice may be related to other anxieties, so be alert to the possibility of underlying problems that have nothing to do with careers or subjects.
- Difficulties with particular course units. Try to encourage advisees to discuss these with the course leader first; if they are reluctant to do so for any reason, talk through the issues with them, but avoid inviting criticism of professional colleagues. Instead, help advisees to identify the underlying problem (e.g. inappropriate course unit choice, specific academic difficulty, personality clash with staff or students) and to find possible solutions for themselves.
- Difficulties with general academic skills, such as writing essays or coping with examinations. As well as offering direct support to the student, if appropriate, you could refer them to departmental handbooks and advice and further resources as offered on the College Study Skills webpage (see <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ecampus/cedas/home.aspx>) or encourage them to attend some of the generic study skills seminars organised by CeDAS. If you suspect that a student may have dyslexia or another specific learning difficulty, advise them to contact the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS) for an expert assessment. Students for whom English is a second language should be referred to the Centre for the Development of Academic Skills (cedas@rhul.ac.uk) (see section 10) which offers a comprehensive range of academic and study skills courses tailored to the needs of speakers of English as a second/foreign language.

- Time management. Students who have been used to reminders from parents or teachers at every stage of their school career can find it hard to manage multiple deadlines on their own. You should, and help them to draw up a sensible work-plan at the beginning of every term, if necessary, but avoid taking on a 'parental' role or nagging them.
- Difficulties with other students, perhaps arising from group projects. Avoid taking sides, but help them to work towards a compromise. As with other transferable skills, the ability to work well in groups requires practice and some support. Please also be aware that difficulties with group work might also be linked to a student's particular disability. For example, students with Asperger's Syndrome could need help in understanding the rules of engagement in group work and might need to be told what constitutes an appropriate comment in a group and what does not. Similarly, group work might be particularly taxing for students with social anxiety. In these cases, please feel free to consult with the Disability and Dyslexia Services DDS or to refer the student to the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS) for targeted study skills sessions.

Financial difficulties are increasingly common and can have a cumulative effect on students' work, with stress and anxiety sometimes combining with too many hours of part-time work to cause academic under-achievement or failure. Apart from offering a sympathetic ear, encourage students to think about whether they could reduce some kinds of spending. Many first-year students, in particular, find it hard at first to get a balance between study and fun. Students in serious financial difficulty should be referred to Student Support and Advisory Services for relevant advice and possible financial assistance through College or Government funding. The Student Financial Advisor offers counselling on budgeting, debt repayment and availability of loans and grants. Students should also be reminded that College regulations only permit full-time students to work up to 20 hours per week in term time.

Personal problems

It is natural that some students will see you as their first port of call in the event of personal difficulties. However, whilst you should expect to give guidance on certain matters, particularly if they have an impact on academic performance or choices, do not try to take on the role of a personal counsellor. Few students are in reality unaware of the various options available to them in a difficult situation, and a seemingly ingenuous appeal for help may in fact be an attempt to persuade you to "tell them what to do". Personal Advisors who perceive themselves as counsellors risk suggesting "solutions" that may be counter-productive or subsequently disowned by the student.

When an advisee comes to you with a serious personal problem, listen sensitively to what they are telling you, but avoid the temptation to offer well intentioned but amateur advice. Use open questions to help the student clarify the issues in their own mind, and encourage them to make contact with the appropriate central or external service. This encouragement should be especially strong if they:

- admit to suicidal thoughts;
- are suffering from abuse or harassment;
- are encountering difficulties due to a disability or long standing condition.

Sometimes, a student will not raise a problem directly even though they may wish to talk about it. They may open an interview by presenting a different, safer issue, to test the water. The Personal Advisor therefore needs to keep an open mind as to whether the first issue presented is the most important one and be alert to the hidden agenda. Other forms of behaviour that may mask an underlying problem include the following:

- non-attendance;
- missed deadlines;
- noticeable change in physical appearance;
- tearfulness;
- reticence in tutorials or seminars;
- isolation (of a hitherto sociable person);
- excessive attention seeking;
- absent-mindedness.

If you observe any of these forms of behaviour in a marked degree, you may wish to consult with colleagues in your department or the Counselling Service before posing direct questions to the student. Do not just advise a student to submit Extenuating Circumstances – they need support to address these issues.

8. Specialist advice and referrals

There are a number of reasons why you might need to refer an advisee on to professional counsellors, many of which are explored in the Counselling Service's on-line presentation for new Personal Advisors, 'Helping Students in Distress'. These include limiting possible dependency by the advisee, and avoiding over-exposure to difficult material, such as suicide threats or accounts of sexual abuse.

You should not hesitate to contact the Counselling Service if you are in any doubt as to whether to refer an advisee, or if you suspect that an advisee may be at risk from themselves or others, or if you would like to discuss an issue that is affecting an advisee.

The Counselling Service also offers resources and general advice to staff on:

- dealing with psychological emergencies;
- helping students undergoing bereavement;
- helping students with eating problems;
- student mental health;
- taking reports of rape and sexual assault.

These are accessible from the "Services for Departments and Staff" page of the Student Counselling Service website (see section 14).

The Chaplaincy and Faith Support Team offer pastoral care and support to all students and staff regardless of their beliefs and may be a particular help for concerns regarding faith and belief. The Chaplains also have a lot of experience working with bereavement.

It is worth thinking in advance about how you would introduce the suggestion that the student might speak to someone other than yourself. It is important that they do not feel you are trying to offload them and their problems, but that you are genuinely concerned to ensure that they get the most appropriate support.

The most important aspects of referral, therefore, are to ensure that an advisee knows:

- why they are being referred to someone else;
- what they can expect from the person to whom they are being referred;
- that their relationship with you will continue.

It is usually best not to make the initial contact with a third party on a student's behalf, and certainly not without their permission. However, if you are worried that they may avoid seeking the necessary professional help, and the matter seems urgent, offer the appropriate details and let them use your telephone during your meeting. If that is not possible, then give them the information they need, in writing, to enable them to do so later.

In the event that you find yourself in a particularly difficult or disruptive situation, the guidelines below may be of some assistance.

- If an advisee is very upset or angry, try to stay calm yourself. Let them finish what they are saying so that you can understand what it is that they want. Ask them calmly to explain the bits you do not understand. Keep judgments to yourself.
- Acknowledge their emotion directly, e.g. "I can see how upset/angry you are and I would like to try to help you".
- Bear in mind that anger is extremely unlikely to be personal to you, but will be an accumulation of events and pressures.
- If the student is very upset, offer them a cup of tea or coffee, which will also give you time to decide on the best way forward.
- If you do not have the time to deal with the situation properly, then it is better to say so, e.g. "I understand what you want, but I'm due in a meeting shortly and I want to make sure I give you the time you need – what time can you come back this afternoon?"
- If you do not know how to help, be honest about it, e.g. "I understand what you want but I'm not sure who can provide that for you. Can you give me some time to make some calls to establish where you can get the help you need?"

Do not expect to receive much, if any, feedback about the outcome of a referral. Other professionals may be bound by confidentiality rules,

although members of staff in certain central College services (including Counselling) are encouraged to allay Personal Advisors' fears by notifying them whether a student has attended an appointment, whether they are continuing treatment, and whether any further action or support is required from the Personal Advisor. It is worth checking that the student is aware of the limits of this kind of feedback, in case they are anxious about it or alternatively that they would prefer you to know exactly what is happening and might automatically assume that you will be kept up to date by someone else. Ask them to let you know how they get on and to come back to you if there are any problems or delays.

9. Students with disabilities and Specific Learning Difficulties

It is particularly important to ensure that students with disabilities and Specific Learning Difficulties such as dyslexia feel confident about meeting their Personal Advisor to explore future needs and any adjustments that may be necessary, as well as discussing their progress on a regular basis.

The Disability and Dyslexia Services website provides a series of 'Frequently Asked Questions', the most relevant of which are reproduced in modified form below. If you need help or advice on supporting a particular student, please contact the Disability and Dyslexia Services.

A student has disclosed to me that they have a disability and I have been told that I need to send them to the Disability & Dyslexia Services to register. What exactly does this entail for the student?

All that this means is the student should be advised to book an appointment to talk to a member of the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS) about their condition or difficulty in order to identify ways in which the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS) might be able to provide support. Contact the DDS about the referral, so that DDS can follow up on attendance. The appointment takes between 10 and 15 minutes and entails Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS) staff taking the student's contact details, talking them through a support package relevant to the disability/Specific Learning Difficulty declared and discussing any extra funding available to them. The student will then be told to submit evidence of the disability or long standing condition (e.g. a recent letter from their GP, or a post 16 Educational Psychologist Assessment), and to return the support pack signed. For some students whose impairment requires more complex adjustment, an individual memo of support will be created and sent to the departmental special needs co-ordinator, the '(DDS) Network Member', who then cascades the information to relevant members of academic and administrative staff. In some departments the Support Memos will be stored on a shared drive so that the relevant members of staff can access details of the adjustments necessary to support the student effectively. The 7 support packages are available online for all to view on the Disability and Dyslexia Services website.

If a student needs Exams Access Arrangements, what do I need to advise them to do?

If the student has a SpLD or disability and is already registered with the Disability & Dyslexia Services, the exams access arrangements will already be known and recorded. All other students will have to ask their doctor to complete an Examination Application Arrangements Form and return it to the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS). The Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS) will then check the supporting evidence and discuss their needs with the department (for exams organised locally), Student Administration and the Head of Academic Quality and Policy. Once the College Board of Examiners Executive Committee has authorised the arrangements, the Exams Office will officially inform the student a couple of months before the end-of-year exam period. Once the arrangements have been applied for and agreed for one year, they will normally be carried over for the remainder of the degree programme. If students have what would be considered a temporary condition, e.g. sudden back pain, they will need to reapply in subsequent years, submitting up to date evidence that the condition is still present and impacting on their ability to sit exams. This also applies to students with disabilities who may have had additional arrangements agreed for temporary conditions.

What can I do if I think a student may have dyslexia?

Please refer them to the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS) for a screening appointment with the Academic Advisor (SpLDs) who will conduct a number of tests which will take around half an hour. The student will discuss the findings with the Academic Advisor (SpLDs) and, depending on the number of 'indicators associated with dyslexia', they may be referred to an Educational Psychologist or a Specialist Teacher for a formal assessment or they may simply be offered additional study skills support, both of which the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS) will co-ordinate. Assessments are subsidised for first and second year UG students (student pay the first £100 of the total cost) but third year UG students and PG students are asked to pay for the assessment in full (£400)

What are our duties under the law?

Disability is defined as one of the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act 2010 requires educational institutions to ensure that they are not treating disabled students less favourably than their non-disabled peers and that they make any reasonable adjustments to their teaching practices, institutional policies and physical access necessary to ensure equal access and opportunities.

I have heard different rumours about our legal responsibility with regards to confidentiality and disclosure. Please can you explain the situation?

If a student has disclosed a disability or Specific Learning Difficulty to any employee of Royal Holloway (in whichever capacity), the University is deemed to know and therefore can be expected to make reasonable adjustments for that student. If a student discloses a disability or Specific Learning Difficulty to you, you are to encourage them to register their disability with the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS). If a student does not want to register with the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS), the staff member needs to point out that very few specific adjustments can be made without 'official' disclosure. If the student persists in refusing to register, the staff member should ask them to sign and date a Disclosure Agreement Form (contact the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS) for a copy), or to keep a written record of the refusal to disclose. This form or written record should indicate that the student is aware of the consequences of non-disclosure, i.e. that they realise that few adjustments can be made without formally declaring their disability to the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS). You should also keep a written record for your own files documenting the dates and contents of all conversations you have had with the student on this subject. If you are in any doubt about a specific student, please do not hesitate to contact the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS).

Does supporting students with disabilities or Specific Learning Difficulties lead to extra financial and time commitments from staff and departmental budgets?

Most students who are UK residents have extra funding from Student Finance England (to cover academic support, equipment, software etc. depending on condition and assessment) and some have funding from Social Services (for personal care support such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, laundry). Both UK and Non-UK residents are able to apply to the Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS) directly for assistance in obtaining a Student Helper or note taker. However, often students with disabilities will still need additional staff time and effort (e.g. extra tutorial time or time taken to create their exam scripts in larger print).

10. Students studying with English as a second language

Students who come from non-British cultural backgrounds can experience all the problems commonly encountered by 'home' students and described in section 7. However, they may need clearer explanations as to the role and availability of their Personal Advisor than their British peers. They may also require a little extra attention to assist them in adjusting to College life, and they may have additional concerns to which the Personal Advisor should be alert. Some of these concerns might include:

- homesickness;
- secondment from employment;
- family expectations;
- study difficulties;
- financial problems;
- religious differences;
- war or civil unrest in the student's home country;

- disappointment;
- cultural differences in the relationship with the Personal Advisors.

It is worth remembering that some international students' reluctance to consult their Personal Advisor, or to notify them of adverse personal circumstances, can be due to under-confidence or embarrassment, or cultural difference, rather than a desire for independence. Where this appears to be the case, Personal Advisors need to think carefully about non-intrusive ways of approaching students who are falling behind with their studies. They should be more proactive in scheduling 'regular' appointments than they might be with 'home' students.

There is an International Student Support Office at the College with special responsibility for international students, including advising them on visa and financial issues. They are also happy to talk to staff about the practical arrangements that can be made for overseas advisees. All student queries related to visas and immigration, however, should be referred directly to this office, as the complex and changeable nature of legislation in this area requires specialist interpretation. Please note in addition that under current immigration rules a student who misses a series of set departmental deadlines will be deemed to not be studying and so will run the risk – after proper College checks - of being reported to the United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI).

The Centre for the Development of Academic Skills (cedas@rhul.ac.uk) runs in-session English language support courses that are aimed at developing specific academic and language skills. A significant number of courses focus specifically on academic writing skills and provide systematic training in areas such as referencing, the use of multiple sources and strategies for avoiding plagiarism. In addition to referring students to the Centre for the Development of Academic Skills (cedas@rhul.ac.uk), Personal Advisors can contact the Centre for the Development of Academic Skills (cedas@rhul.ac.uk) directly for advice on possible language learning materials that students can use independently.

The staff of the Centre for the Development of Academic Skills (cedas@rhul.ac.uk) may be able to answer queries from Personal Advisors relating to specific cultural backgrounds or expectations.

The Chaplaincy and Faith Support Staff can provide information about religious beliefs and festivals, as well as putting students in touch with local faith groups

11. Written records and confidentiality

It is helpful to take a few minutes at the end of a Personal Advisor-advisee meeting to review what has been discussed and confirm any actions that have been agreed. For example, a student might be asked to focus on improving their essay-writing skills, or to keep a diary for a week to help with time management.

Depending on your departmental systems, you may be expected to record this, with a copy for the student and another for your own or departmental files. If this is the case, you should ensure that your summary of the encounter is accurate and relevant, and that opinions are clearly differentiated from facts. Remember that a student has a right to see any information kept on file about them and that in the event of a dispute, all records and emails can be called for use in evidence.

Any recording system, of course, raises the question of confidentiality. The need for clarity around information about disability was discussed in section 9. Similar principles should apply to any other information disclosed in tutorials (e.g. about domestic problems, or bereavement). If it may affect the student's ability to fulfil the demands of their course, encourage them to let relevant staff know about it or ask if they would like you to do this on their behalf, but do not do so without explicit permission. Whatever is agreed about disclosure to staff, you should of course never discuss information revealed in the course of a Personal Advisor-advisee meeting to other students or to non-College members such as a student's parents.

Make sure that students are aware that they can submit notification to the Chair of the Sub-Board of Examiners if their situation has a substantial impact on any aspect of their work. Where a student's performance appears to have been adversely affected by circumstances that are unforeseen and unpreventable, such as serious illness or bereavement, the Sub-Board may take this into consideration when making decisions on progression. However, students should be aware that if they have ongoing issues throughout the year, e.g. caring responsibilities, anxiety issues, these will not normally be considered as extenuating circumstances by the Sub-board as they are not generally unforeseen. Students should be strongly advised to contact DDS for appropriate support. If students feel they have extenuating circumstances that meet the criteria, the examiners can only consider them if the student has informed them in advance in writing, and has provided appropriate medical or other documentary evidence. A full guide to this procedure, what circumstances meet the criteria and what evidence is required, is contained in the 'Instructions to Candidates' and the Guidelines on extenuating circumstances published annually by Student Administration on the Exams, Assessment and Results webpage (<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/students/study/exams/exams-assessments-and-results.aspx>).

Generally it is better never to promise students confidentiality, since there are many situations which you cannot keep confidential and students will feel understandably betrayed if you have given an undertaking and then have to go back on it. It is better to indicate that everything you hear will be treated with discretion and will be kept private as long as this does not compromise the College's position or prevent you from taking action when there is a real and imminent risk. Obviously, whenever possible, we would try to gain a student's consent to, and involve them in, a disclosure.

You should not feel obliged to keep confidential any information that might compromise your own or the College's position (for instance, if a

student is telling you about a serious breach or intended breach of the law, or of College regulations).

Disclosure may also be required where there is a genuine concern for the student's safety (for instance, when they have expressed suicidal feelings) requiring notification of their GP or other specialist help or where a student tells of others being at risk – e.g. as a result of serious criminal action by a fellow student.

Thornier situations may arise where an advisee makes a revelation about the conduct of another member of academic staff, whether this involves unprofessional comments, actions, or a personal relationship with a student.

If you find yourself in a personal relationship with a student, you have a duty of disclosure as stipulated in the College's 'Guidelines on Personal Relationships between Staff, Students and Others', which are available on the Campus Intranet and cover business connections as well as friendships and intimate relationships.

Exceptionally, you may be asked for information by parents or other relatives of an advisee. Should this occur, you should consult the College's codes on 'Data Protection Policy' and 'Parental Contact', which are, likewise, available on the Campus Intranet.

Advice on all disclosure issues can be readily obtained from the Support and Advisory Services Department. They can often allay or verify concerns about students by consulting colleagues in all sections of the support services who may be in touch with the students; the team can also normally make contact with students who have temporarily ceased to attend and there is authority, where necessary, to involve a student's parents where there are clear indicators of risk.

More information is available at:

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/iquad/collegepolicies/documents/pdf/academic/parentalcontact.pdf> .

We ask all members of the campus community to alert the welfare team (welfare@royalholloway.ac.uk) to any concerns about students. Further information on our processes are available at

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/staff/teaching/advice-for-when-you-have-concerns-about-a-student.aspx>

12. Personal and career development planning

The College's P.D.P. website provides full information on Personal Development Planning as it is defined by the Quality Assurance Agency, including the advice that academic staff acting in the capacity of Personal Advisors should:

- familiarize themselves with the processes involved in structured development planning by reading the 'For Students' section of the site;

- be prepared to discuss learning, achievement and employment goals with each of their advisees on request at least once a year, and make it clear to all advisees that this is the case;
- be prepared to read and discuss completed Personal Development Records with each of their advisees on request at least once a year, and make it clear to all advisees that this is the case.

If you feel the generic Personal Development Record is too cumbersome for your students, and there is no equivalent in your department, you might consider using a simple end-of-year review form instead (see the end of this guide for one example). Such forms help focus Personal Advisor-advisee meetings and provide a springboard for the discussion of future plans.

It is important that you encourage your advisees to explore the on-line resources offered by the Careers Service, and to visit the Careers Centre itself, at an early stage. However, you should not merely 'offload' students on to a professional careers counsellor, or shy away from careers conversations altogether. Often, your advisees will not expect you to have expert answers to their queries: what they really want is a chance to talk through their abilities, interests, and possibilities.

You can aid this kind of dialogue by asking general questions about a student's work or academic progress, for instance:

- Which assignments have most challenged you recently? Least challenged you? Why?
- What part of your course has been most valuable to you this year?
- If you asked three of your fellow-students to give feedback on your greatest strengths, what would they say?
- If you could give yourself the perfect assignment, what would it be?

At the very least, you should find out the name of the Careers Liaison Tutor in your department and ensure that they inform you of any discipline-related careers events your advisees might attend.

13. Writing references

As a Personal Advisor, you are likely to be asked to provide references for current and former advisees by both employers and other academic institutions.

The College Secretary's Office has provided guidance ('References – A Guidance Note') on writing references, available via the Campus intranet, and the following points of good practice may also aid the process.

You should:

- explain to advisees how you handle reference requests and what you might reasonably expect from them (advance warning, copies of job advertisements or person specifications, course details etc);
- encourage students to keep and pass on to you an up-to-date CV;

- consider having your own system for noting individual students' achievements, interests and behaviour;
- respond to requests for references as quickly as possible;
- provide references in the format requested by the employer, admissions tutor or equivalent;
- try to substantiate all statements with hard evidence;
- avoid divulging information about medical conditions (whether past or present) or personal circumstances without the student's explicit consent;
- be clear when stating an opinion rather than facts – use phrases such as 'it is my belief' or 'to the best of my knowledge' if in any doubt;
- avoid ambiguous, equivocal or 'coded' comments;
- think carefully about the level of detail that is likely to be required by the recipient – academic institutions and the security services generally expect far more information than the average corporate employer, who may primarily want confirmation of the facts given in the student's application;
- please be especially circumspect if you are asked to comment on the honesty of the student if you are aware that the student has been found guilty of an assessment offence; seek advice from Student & Advisory Services;
- bear in mind that the features which are most important to you in assessing a student, such as academic potential, may not hold the same significance for an employer;
- avoid writing anything you would not want the student to see;
- emphasize strengths rather than weaknesses;
- give Finalists, in particular, plenty of notice of upcoming periods of leave and suggest alternative academic referees;
- consider placing notes from advisory meetings and previous references in the care of a colleague or on a staff shared drive where they can be accessed in your absence.

If you believe you have cause to refuse to write even a basic factual reference for an advisee, you should discuss the matter with your Head of School or Department before notifying the student. If you are in doubt as to the legal implications or desirability of disclosing that the student is (or was) in bad standing with the College, e.g. for disciplinary or financial reasons, you should consult the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Officer.

Handbook revised 2010 (KN:CB), 2014, 2015, 2016 (MC)

14. Useful contacts for staff

Academic Appeals

Website:

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ecampus/academicsupport/academicappealsandcollegecomplaints.aspx>

Academic Quality and Policy Office

Website:

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/iquad/services/academicqualityandpolicyoffice/home.aspx>

E-mail: Academic-Quality-and-Policy@rhul.ac.uk

Academic Regulations

Website:

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ecampus/academicsupport/regulations/home.aspx>

Accommodation

Website:

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/studyhere/accommodation/home.aspx>

See Student Services Centre information below

Careers and Employability Service

Website: <http://www.rhul.ac.uk/careers>

E-mail: careers@royalholloway.ac.uk

Centre: Ground floor, Horton Building

Enquiries: 01784 443073

Centre for the Development of Academic Skills (CeDAS)

Website: <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ecampus/cedas/home.aspx>

Email: cedas@rhul.ac.uk

Office: International Building 002

Enquiries: 01784 443368

Chaplaincy and Faith Support

Website: <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/chaplaincy>

E-mail: chaplaincy@royalholloway.ac.uk

Office: FW 169

Enquiries: 01784 443950

Childcare

Website:

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ecampus/welfare/childcare.aspx>

Or refer generally to Support & Advisory Services

Email: welfare@royalholloway.ac.uk

Community, Wellbeing & Student Outreach

Website

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ecampus/welfare/wellbeing/wellbeinghome.aspx>

Email: wellbeing@royalholloway.ac.uk

Office: FW 170

Enquiries: 01784 443394

See also Support & Advisory Services

Counselling

Website: <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/students/help-support/counselling/home.aspx>

E-mail: counselling@royalholloway.ac.uk

Office: FW 171

Enquiries: 01784 443128

Disability and special educational needs

See Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS)

Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS)

Website:

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ecampus/welfare/disabilityanddyslexiaservices/home.aspx>

E-mail: disability-dyslexia@rhul.ac.uk

Office: FW 149

Enquiries: 01784 276473

Examinations

Website: <http://www.rhul.ac.uk/registry/Examinations/>

E-mail: student-administration@rhul.ac.uk

Financial advice

Website:

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ecampus/finance/feesandfunding.aspx>

E-mail: financialadvice@rhul.ac.uk

Office: FW 150

Enquiries: 01784 276109

Support for mature students:

Tina Barnard

Student Finance Welfare Adviser

01784 414633

Email: Tina.Barnard@royalholloway.ac.uk

See also Support & Advisory Services

Health Centre

Website:

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/students/help-support/health-centre/home.aspx>

Location: FE1 Founder's East, 1st floor

Appointments: 01784 443131

International Student Support

Website:

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/international/support/studentsupportservices/home.aspx>

E-mail: InternationalAdvice@rhul.ac.uk

Office: IN 009

Enquiries: 01784 443663

See also Support & Advisory Services

Mature student support

Email: welfare@royalholloway.ac.uk *Refer to Support & Advisory Services*

Medical

See Health Centre

Personal Development Planning

Website:

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/careers/gainexperience/pdp/pdp.aspx>

Residential Support Team

Website:

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ecampus/welfare/residentialsupport/residentialsupport.aspx>

Email: residentialsupport@rhul.ac.uk

Office: IN 008

Enquiries: A Residential Support Assistant is on duty each evening after 7.00pm (and all day over weekends) for urgent issues that need addressing at the time. They should be contacted via your hall Customer Service Point or Security Services (01784 443063). Non-urgent issues can be addressed by the Residential Support Team [by email](#) or calling 01784 443237 during the day, Monday-Friday.

See also Support & Advisory Services

Student Services Centre

Website:

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ssc>

Opening hours: (term time) Monday to Friday, 10am to 6pm

(vacation time) Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm

E-mail: student-enquiries@rhul.ac.uk

Location: Student Services Centre, Windsor Building, ground floor

Enquiries: 01784 276641

Support & Advisory Services (Welfare & Wellbeing)

Website: <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/students/help-support/help-and-support.aspx>

Founder's West, 1st floor

E-mail: welfare@royalholloway.ac.uk

Head of Service: christopher.butler@royalholloway.ac.uk

Study Skills

See Centre for the Development of Academic Skills (CeDAS)

15. Emergency contacts

College security: 01784 443063 (x3063) or in an emergency 444 on internal phone lines

Emergency services: 999 (please advise College Security if an emergency service is called)

Surrey Police: 101 for non-urgent issues; 999 in an emergency

Health Centre: 01784 443131 (x3131)

Counselling Service: 01784 443128 (x3128)

Samaritans: 08457 90 90 90

Nightline: 020 7 631 0101 (during term time)

16. Sample end of year review form (normally provided by department)

ADVISEE REVIEW

This form is to be completed and submitted to your Personal Advisor in the summer term.

It is an opportunity to reflect on the activities of the year and will also prove to be a useful resource when you are applying for jobs and your Personal Advisor is writing references.

Name:

Year:

Courses undertaken:

Extra-curricular activities undertaken/Passport Points gained:

Do you feel that you achieved what you set out to do this year?

Were there any specific factors that helped or hindered your progress?

What do you feel were your strengths this year?

What would you like to improve on?

Have there been any other surprises/highlights/points of learning that you would like to comment on?

Personal Advisor's comments: