
A Guide for Personal Academic Tutors Extended Guide

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Introduction

Personal Academic Tutors (PATs) are at the centre of the student support system at QMUC. The role is a broad one and this guide does not try to deal with every aspect. It aims to supplement the summary guide by providing more discussion on the boundaries of the PAT role, encouraging students to identify issues affecting their academic progress, and making effective referrals to appropriate support services. Perhaps more importantly, given the limited time available for such contact time, this guide concentrates on ways of making that time, and any guidance given, more effective. This approach aims to build on the QMUC regulations for PATs by providing opportunities for reflection on your experience and skills, examples of good practice and links to relevant resources and templates for materials that you may find helpful.

The aim of student-centred learning and teaching is to encourage the development of students as independent learners. The research literature suggests that PATs have an important role in facilitating this process. Most students will graduate from QMUC without any major crises, but all of them will experience the day to day stress of combining their study, work and personal lives. The unique contribution of the PAT is as the personal interface with the institution, providing support for the routine stresses of student life and referral to other parts of the student support service when necessary. If you are a new PAT the role may seem daunting. There may be specific features of the role in your subject area that go beyond the core responsibilities outlined in the QMUC guidelines. You can use this guide to explore the boundaries of the role, but do talk to experienced colleagues and your head of subject. We hope that whether you are an experienced PAT or someone new to the role you will find something of interest in this guide.

LINK TO THE QMUC REGULATIONS

<http://www.qmuc.ac.uk/quality/> To access QMUC policy on PATs follow this link to the Quality website and then look under Governance and Regulations/Management of Programmes. You can also find the regulations in Appendix A of this guide.

The PAT role

The QMUC regulations refer to the PAT as the 'direct link between the student and the University College'. PATs' views of the role were recently surveyed. In most subject areas, PATs felt they undertook the majority of the tasks listed.

- Discuss and advise on module choices
- Advise on assessment extensions, problems with organising timetables and, if appropriate, support and facilitate placements
- Provide information to Boards of examiners and Course Committee as required
- Provide students with advice on specific recommendation from Boards of Examiners
- Maintain records of documentation (clinic reports, letters relating to progress through course, extenuating circumstances) relating to students
- Provide some careers advice, especially for courses with professional body connections, and encourage membership of professional bodies
- Provide references where appropriate
- Review performance, and be aware of issues which may impinge on the student's learning
- Offer suggestions for sources of advice and help
- Offer adaptive strategies for dealing with academic problems and learning skills issues
- Liaise with relevant support staff where necessary
- Address identified student difficulties, including absence

PAT skills

It's important to recognise that the PAT is part of a web of support services. You don't have to be an expert on careers, finance or other specialist services to be a PAT. Nor are you a counsellor. But the PAT focus on academic support within a broader system is distinctive. Earwaker (1992) notes the tensions and ambiguities that necessarily exist in the tutor/tutee relationship. He locates the skills of the personal tutor as somewhere between those of the good interviewer who

'...has a clear idea where the conversation is going, keeps control of it and determines its direction.'

and the counsellor who

'allows the client to determine the content, the direction and even the pace of the conversation.'

PATs generally concur that the skills required for the role would include the following:

- Awareness of and respect for the diversity of student backgrounds.
- The ability to communicate effectively with students.
- Effective listening skills and the ability to use open questions to go beyond the presenting issue.
- Awareness and understanding of the power relationships that mediate tutor-student and male-female relationships.
- Understanding and observation of boundaries.
- A readiness to seek advice and to refer on.

Some of these issues are discussed further in subsequent sections and appendices, and where possible we provide links to resources and further reading.

What can the student expect of their PAT?

- To be a friendly and helpful first point of contact with the institution.
- To be a source of advice and guidance on all matters relating to academic progress.
- To arrange a meeting at least once each semester.
- To keep an agreed record of meetings.
- To respect confidentiality.
- To respond to requests for meetings promptly, and refer to other sources of help if an early meeting is not possible.
- That matters discussed with the PAT will be confidential except in instances where keeping confidentiality might result in harm to the student or others.
- To be aware of the broader network of support services at QMUC and to be ready to refer on when appropriate.
- To act as a link with other members of academic staff and as an advocate for the student in appropriate circumstances.

Handout 1 (see Appendix E) provides a template on student expectations that you may wish to use with your students. You might wish to amend the template. There may, for example, be specific features of the PAT role in your subject area that you would want to include.

What can the PAT expect of their student?

- To respond promptly to requests from their PAT for a meeting
- To respect the times which the PAT has said they will be available
- To be sure they know how best to contact their PAT in the event of an emergency
- To keep the PAT informed of circumstances that may have an effect on their studies
- To bring any agreed notes or information to meetings with their PAT

Preparing for the first meeting

The first meeting with your tutees is an important part of their induction to the University. Whatever their previous educational experience starting at QMUC is a big step into a new world.

If you are new to the role, it is particularly worth reflecting on your own experiences as a new student, and how it felt to adapt not just to academic study, but the whole social and physical environment of university.

The literature on transition to study in higher education stresses the importance of early orientation to the institution. An evaluation of induction at QMUC (Cannell, 2005) noted that students value very highly the social links that they make early on with staff and other students. The first meeting should take place as early as possible, and at least within the first 6 weeks.

The timing of your first PAT tutorial depends on what other provision is made for induction in your subject area. However, in order to facilitate the development of relationships with other students, and with yourself, there is a strong case for making the first contact with your tutees a group session where possible.

Merits of a group session

- Encourages social contact with fellow students
- Speeds up the settling-in process
- Encourages students to raise issues early on
- Sets a pattern for staff-student dialogue, as well as peer dialogue – a useful model for future groupwork and seminars
- Generally, an aid to retention. Students feel part of the institution more quickly, and feel listened to

Although desirable, a group session is not always practical for some sub/school areas. It is also possible to have a one-one session that provides a useful and positive experience for both student and PAT. Some of the suggestions below may help with both types of session.

The first meeting

First impressions have a lasting impact, so it's important that the design of the first session reflects the importance of the PAT/student relationship and recognises above all that students are new to the institution.

Students need to feel oriented and comfortable about having made the first step in transition before they can confidently make decisions about the type of information they need to access. Confident students are more likely to become independent students.

With this in mind, the first meeting is not the time for a lot of detailed information. Thirty minutes that leave a student more relaxed, and able to identify a couple of sources of information, is better than an hour of information that cannot be remembered at all.

Useful aims for a first meeting might be:

- To allow students to engage briefly with each other, reflect on experience so far, ask questions and feel reassured – if a group (See Appendix D for suggestions)
- To allow time, use open questions to engage an individual student, if in a one-to-one session
- To clarify the PAT role and the responsibilities for the PAT and the student
- To clarify contact details: when, and how often to meet, and who is responsible for contact
- To emphasise that wider support is available, and where/how to find more information
- To explain what happens next in relation to the PAT role

A simple agenda to achieve these aims might look like this:

Sample agenda for first meeting with tutees

1. Quick intro, interaction between students if a group
2. Introduction and outline of the PAT role
3. Clarify links to other services, where to find the information (mention the student diary)
4. Questions - pick up on issues raised earlier..
5. Clarify PAT contact details, when and how to contact, who is responsible, what happens next.

What happens next

Whatever type of first meeting is held, it's important that students leave knowing what happens next. You should establish that the routine is that you will arrange a meeting each semester. There is strong evidence, however, that front loading your support in the first semester has great benefits in terms of retention and progression. With this in mind, in year one you may wish to arrange an additional one-one session in the first semester.

Clarify contact details

Students are often vague about the best way of contacting their PAT, and leave random notes and emails regardless of the urgency of an issue. At the end of the first meeting, it is worth emphasising how, when and when not to get in touch.

A reminder about support services, and where to obtain information, is also useful here.

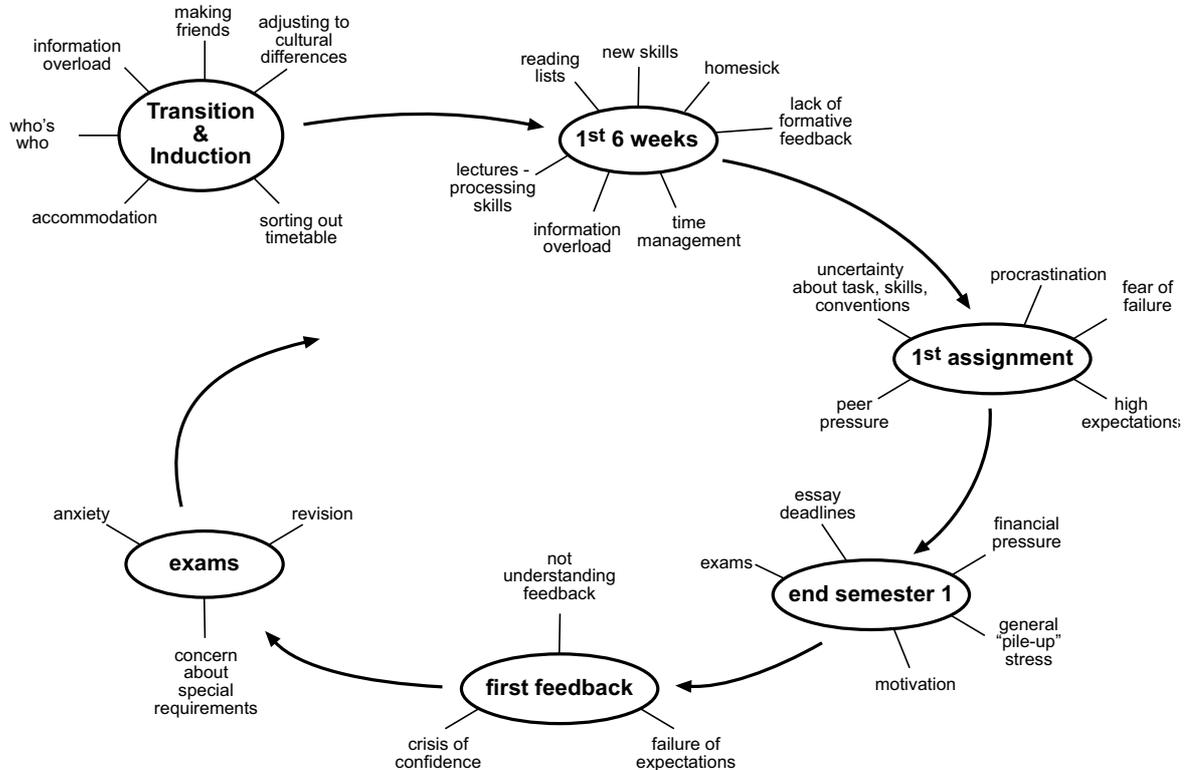
Some do's and don'ts for a first meeting.

- Do keep your input and general information brief – students are already overloaded. They need to know where to find information.
- Do keep the session social and interactive
- Do make time at start and finish for the students to interact
- Do refer to support services as a positive resource not as an emergency service
- Do encourage individual follow-up appointments in semester 1
- Do watch out for who's involved and who's not, notice anyone who looks uncomfortable or unsure and follow up if necessary.

- Don't give out loads of information
- Don't spend all the time talking
- Don't see it as a mini-lecture
- Don't assume that a nil-response to your questions means that the students don't have any!

Good timing – the student life cycle

It is often a combination of stresses at various key points which can affect student progress, especially in the first semester, and occasionally lead to a student deciding to leave altogether.



Student life cycle model

Diagram 1 see Appendix E

Some pressures like finance may be long term but may be brought to a head by other issues, for example the first set of assignment deadlines. Academic stress and practical day to day matters are often intertwined and part of the skill of a good PAT is to help students untangle these issues.

Well timed interventions can make a huge difference. For example, the feedback on a first assignment can 'make or break' a student whose confidence in their academic writing ability is shaky from lack of experience. A reminder about a service that provides specific support can make the difference between drop-out and retention. Similarly, being aware of the likely 'crunch' points can help a PAT give a general piece of advice to a tutee group via email (see 'Tips from current PATs, below).

Maintaining contact – follow up meetings

New students: keeping in touch early on

Policy guidelines state a meeting should be held at least once a semester. As mentioned earlier, and in view of the 'life-cycle' examples, it is hugely beneficial for new students to see their PAT twice in the first semester. First signs of a student losing motivation are often unnoticed – missing a few lectures, then a seminar – and extra PAT meetings can pick up on these warning signs at a stage when intervention can be most effective.

Regular meeting

The regular meeting might address routine administrative procedures related to a course, but is also a useful moment, especially in the student's first year, for enquiring about academic progress in general.

If you see your tutee in the classroom on a regular basis you may well start a regular meeting with a shared base of experience for discussing their academic development. Quite often, however, this will not be the case and you need to think about how to get the student to open up and go beyond the 'it's going fine' type of response. One way of dealing with this is to ask the student to prepare in advance – you might want to use a checklist or a brief reflection on progress prompted by some simple questions. Handout 2 in Appendix C is one possible form.

Academic issues

It is usually more fruitful to ask more specific types of questions, rather than a general 'everything going OK?' The kinds of academic issues you may wish to ask about, depending on what is timely, could include:

- Organising, managing workload, juggling responsibilities
- Getting things done – adapting to independent study?
- Communication, especially with other students – group work
- Writing skills – developing? More confident?

General issues

Different combinations of pressures may affect a student at particular times of the year. As well as a brief check re: academic progress, it is useful to check that things are going well in general, and whether there are other issues which may mean the student requires advice on a source of support or guidance.

It can help to ask about a few general pastoral care areas as a prompt – but only as a way of directing a student to a source of support. Areas could include:

- Accommodation – working out OK?
- Time pressures – family, travel, paid work, stress?
- Seasonal pressures –holidays, finance?
- Contact with peers – making friends, meeting friends to discuss study with?

Extra meetings

As well as dealing with the central issue of the meeting, (extension request, administration) it is useful to briefly check, as above, that things are going OK in general for a student. Sorting out the administrative side of an essay extension may be quick and routine; helping a student to identify related issues, and reminding them about various services, can help the student develop the confidence to seek out appropriate support independently next time.

If there seems to be an underlying issue, or you simply suspect one, it is especially worth making some general enquiries, as above, in order to recommend further guidance where appropriate. However, students may not feel like/want to discuss an issue, in which case any attempt to explore further is inappropriate. A PAT cannot be responsible for the outcome of any issue which a student has not been willing to discuss.

Contact tips from current PATS

Tutee mass-emails

Well-intentioned but untimely information tends to be over-looked. A useful way to flag up timely issues/support services is to use a **tutee-list email** for reminders about where a specific service can be found and how they can help.

The Student Diary uses this approach in its weekly reminders about services. The advantage of PAT reminders is that you can tailor the timing and the content to your own subject area. Brief and occasional tutee-emails are also a quick and easy way of providing basic reassurance that the institution has student welfare at heart.

Group meetings

For some subjects, where it is more practically possible to arrange, a short group session is very useful way to deal with an issue that otherwise sends everyone to their PAT individually. Topics that some PATs have covered in 'one-off' short group sessions are referencing, plagiarism and principles of good group work.

'Open Hour'

Some tutors have an open hour once a week when students can drop in with quick queries. This won't suit everyone, but a similar arrangement, maybe once a month, could help pick up and address smaller issues before they become more time-consuming.

Non-attendance

If a student fails to attend a PAT meeting, and does not respond to a follow-up email, the school office can provide guidance on policy and responsibility for 'chasing-up' the student in general. Schools vary in their approach to this, so it helps to check the appropriate procedure with the school office at an early stage.

Boundaries

An important aspect of the PAT role is referring students in the right direction for support when this lies beyond the PAT remit. For these reasons, it's crucial to have a clear sense of role boundaries when listening and talking to students.

Role boundaries

The PAT role is to provide advice, guidance and support on academic matters, but this usually involves students raising other issues. In specific instances when boundaries of responsibility seem unclear, some PATs suggest that working through a few basic stages, after an issue has been raised, can help tutor and student:

- Encourage the student to focus on how an issue might be affecting academic performance, e.g. extra time needed for assignment due to illness, problems with concentration/time following bereavement
- Explain and arrange the practicalities that can be put in place by subject staff, and be clear about any limits to these e.g. how long allowed for an extension
- Identify further support needs and suggest who to contact, or provide information for student to follow up e.g. give out leaflet re: a specific service

It is not the PAT's role to provide additional support beyond the academic, but in order to identify further support needs, you may have to explore briefly other aspects of an issue in order to recommend services that can help.

In an emergency situation with a student, where prompt assistance or a clinical response is required, **phone security on 2222** for immediate assistance and first aid where needed.

For details of suggested emergency responses, see guidelines in the Mental Health Protocol

Identifying Issues

Extra time

Although many students are straightforward about raising issues that are causing concern, some are less so, particularly if they are new, or feel unsure about the consequences of doing so. This makes it harder to recommend a useful source of support, so some time may be needed to try to draw the student out on this.

Open questions and listening

Although working out any underlying issues is more a question of using everyday teaching and listening skills, what is important is not assuming the first issue mentioned by the student is the key issue. Asking a few 'open' questions to draw a student out more, and, importantly, listening to what the student is saying, can help more significant issues to surface. General non-academic areas, as mentioned in the 'meetings section', can be starting points.

(see also appendix D)

Clarifying boundaries-for yourself

Once an issue beyond the academic has been mentioned, it is fine to recommend the student to contact another service for guidance. How far a PAT listens or talks through issues with a tutee has to remain an individual decision. No member of staff should feel they have to go beyond the point where they feel comfortable with, or responsive to a topic.

Clarifying boundaries-for the student

When a service is recommended is a matter of individual judgement, but it is useful to make clear to the student, fairly straightforwardly, that a boundary has been reached, as in 'I'm not able to advise you further about this, but x can advise you further...it's best if someone more experienced in this, such as x, meets you soon to talk this through'...

General recommendations

Another important point to remember is that any 'diagnosis', by PAT or student, doesn't have to be totally accurate – staff in student services are very used to working out what support is most appropriate. It is probably reassuring for students to be aware of this too – that it is fine to turn up at Student Services in need of advice and support, without feeling too sure about which service will help.

Student Services

There is still an image of student support as 'deficit' – that it is embarrassing or a sign of some inadequacy, especially among younger students, that you look for support. Many students only contact SS at a crisis point, when an issue may be harder to resolve. In addition, feeling under any pressure to access a service can be counter-productive.

These points are worth bearing in mind:

- Students are more likely to be pro-active about seeking support early if the positive aspect of the support is emphasised – positively-worded examples encourage this, and help draw attention to the advisory rather than emergency aspect of the services.
e.g. 'If you want to develop your essay writing strategies...', rather than 'If you are struggling with an essay...'
- A decision to use support services has to be the student's own. As staff, we can advise or strongly recommend, but that is all. This should help to clarify boundaries: a recommendation of a service does not commit the PAT to any further involvement in the matter. Awareness of this boundary should actually help in encouraging a PAT to consider the breadth of an issue, and what might assist, provided that the information is judged as helpful, rather than over-loading, for the student.
- If you think a student might want to consider using a service, it's best to give them information – a leaflet for that service – and let them think it over and take the next step. It's not helpful for students or staff for a PAT to phone a service on a student's behalf, or bring them down physically to student services.

See Appendix C for more information on referral to Student Services or other services

Appendix A: University College Policy

This document may be found on the Quality Website:

<http://www.qmuc.ac.uk/quality/>

**Follow the links for Governance and Regulations and then
Management of Programmes**

8.0 PERSONAL ACADEMIC TUTORING SYSTEM [UNDER REVIEW]

8.1 The University College recognises that a Personal Academic Tutoring System (PATS), for all students on taught programmes, should operate across the University College for the following aims and purposes:

- The Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) will act as a facilitator and ‘mentor’ to the student whilst at the University College, encouraging the student to optimise their learning opportunities.
- The PAT is expected to refer students to other appropriate agencies and fully trained staff either within the University College or elsewhere for support and resolution of issues of concern to both tutor and student.
- The PAT may expect to act as advocate on behalf of the student and in this role can be expected to make statements, either written or oral, to the Course Committee (reserved business), Board of Examiners or others as requested to do so.

8.2 Policy

8.2.1 Each Head of School is expected to;

- provide each student with a PAT throughout their academic studies at QMUC;
- provide details about the PATs at QMUC in Student and Course Handbooks and especially to detail the expectations which the student may have of the system and the expectations the academic and other staff have of the student;
- establish a system for recording the nature and outcome of the interaction between student and PAT;

- have a named person within the subject area who is responsible for co-ordinating the PATS and provide an effective evaluation and monitoring process;
- report through the Annual Course Monitoring exercise on the operation of the System;
- establish regular opportunities for staff development and training for academic and other staff in order to support the System.

The overall responsibility for an effective PATS lies with the Head of School.

It is expected that;

- the PAT will meet with their tutee at least once per semester;
- all students new to the University College will meet with their PAT during the first 4 to 6 weeks, and ideally earlier, of their studies at QMUC;
- all students returning to QMUC will meet with their PAT in the first 4 to 6 weeks.

8.3 Implementation of the Policy on the PATS at QMUC

It is expected that the Head of School will make explicit to both staff and student the nature of the PATS, its purpose and its boundaries. A co-ordinator (e.g. Programme Leader) will be appointed and a system for monitoring and evaluation established. It is expected that the Head of School will, through Career Review and Staff Development Scheme, acknowledge the role which staff are expected to undertake commensurate with the responsibilities of a successful PATS.

It is acknowledged that for part-time students meetings may not always be easily arranged. However it is vital and perhaps more so, for part-time students, that an effective PATS is maintained. This policy allows for a defined explicit system to be devised for part-time students.

8.4 Expectations of the PAT

8.4.1 The PAT will be the direct link between the student and the University College and plays a key role (see below) in the support network for the student offered by the Course and the University College.

- 8.4.2 The PAT will make clear to the student the boundaries of their supporting role and encourage the student to make use of other facilities, especially for academic counselling by module co-ordinators, to their tutees.
- 8.4.3 A PAT can expect to remain with the same student for the duration of their time at the University College. In some cases the student or the tutor may request that a different tutor is assigned.
- 8.4.4 The PAT must initiate a meeting with their academic tutee at least once a semester.
- 8.4.5 The PAT will keep an agreed record of each meeting with the student. Ideally it will indicate areas for action and this will be filed centrally in the School with the confidential records of the student.
- 8.4.6 The PAT may meet with their tutees as a group but should always be prepared to meet with each tutee individually.

8.5 Expectations of the Student

- 8.5.1 The student must expect to meet with their PAT at least once a Semester. Tutees may request further meetings but it is the responsibility of both student and staff that at least one meeting takes place.
- 8.5.2 The student can expect to be part of an Academic Tutorial Group* which is likely to comprise of students from different years of programmes of study. The student may also expect to meet with other members of an Academic Tutor Group on at least one occasion during the academic year to foster group support.
- 8.5.3 The student during their studies at QMUC is expected to accept the responsibilities of autonomy and independence and this includes acknowledging and using the PATS in a responsible manner and with sensitivity.
- 8.5.4 The student can expect to take responsibility for any agreed course of action which may result as an outcome from the meetings.
- 8.5.5 Students who consistently fail to attend meetings initiated by the PAT, can have this non-attendance notified to their Head of Subject.

*An Academic Tutorial Group is a term used to describe all tutees assigned to one member of staff.

8.6 Confidentiality

8.6.1 Meeting and discussions with PATs may raise confidential issues. PATs and students must be aware of the tutor's duty of confidence to the student and also of the need to carry through the consequences of this discussion particularly if it raises serious academic issues. The student must also be aware that in some cases the law requires that issues concerning criminal behaviour may need to be revealed.

8.7 Expectations of the Head of School

8.7.1 The Head of School must establish a system for effective Personal Academic Tutoring based on the Policy and is responsible for communicating the System to all who work and study in the School including Visiting Lecturers.

8.7.2 The PAT has a role significantly different from that of the Course Leader and this must be made clear to both staff and students.

8.7.3 The PAT will be a full-time member of the academic staff normally within the Department which is responsible for the programme of studies on which the student is registered for an award.

8.7.4 The Head of School, as resource manager, must acknowledge the vital role of the PAT during reviews of resource deployment in the School.

8.7.5 PATs must have the opportunity to attend appropriate training sessions and discussions concerning their role at School and University College level.

8.7.6 A list clearly indicating the allocation of PATs, together with their contact address, must be made known to academic staff, students and other support staff in the School within one week of the start of the Semester and preferably before. A copy of this Policy must be available to all students.

8.7.7 Each School may wish to add additional responsibilities to the role of the PAT. This is a matter for internal discussion and resource allocation. The roles and responsibilities of the Academic Tutor and Academic Tutee must be clearly articulated to students through their handbooks.

8.8 The following are notes of guidance for the responsibilities of the PAT

- 8.8.1 The PAT will discuss with the student any issues of concern, which may be of a resource nature e.g. accommodation or grants/loans; of an educational nature such as study skills, work patterns, time management, preparation for assessment, general attitude to academic work; or of a professional nature such as employment opportunities, membership of professional bodies.
- 8.8.2 The PAT is expected to make a full and an agreed (with the student) record of the interview so that it is of benefit to the student.
- 8.8.3 The PAT is not expected to resolve specific academic problems related to individual modules although they may be used to counsel students on mechanisms by which these academic problems may be resolved.
- 8.8.4 The PAT is expected to *initiate* one meeting with all new tutees at some point during the first 4 to 6 weeks of the first Semester and thereafter at least once per Semester. The interview will review progress and explore any issues and problems which the student has. These interviews are recorded, an action plan initiated if appropriate and the records placed in the individual student file (see attached for an example of a record sheet).
- 8.8.5 The PAT may initiate more tutorials with their tutee specifically to address issues such as attendance and other issues which have been drawn to the attention of the PAT.*
- 8.8.6 The PAT is expected to notify the Head of School of any tutee who persistently fails to present themselves for a personal tutorial.

Appendix B: Confidentiality

At QMUC, good practice in confidentiality is governed by the Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection Act. The guidelines below are based on general good practice. For further guidance, PATs should approach heads of subject and school.

- Ensuring confidentiality is vital in encouraging students to come forward and seek help when they need it. Students need to know that any information they give will be treated with respect and passed on only with their agreement to those who need to know.
- If a PAT is in receipt of sensitive information, which has implications for the student's academic process, the student needs to be clear what will happen with that information. This includes who is told, what they are told, why they are told, and where the information is to be held or stored. The student needs to understand any steps to be taken, and give their consent to the information being passed on to the appropriate parties.
- If the information does not have immediate implications for their academic work, the PAT may want to recommend another source of support or information, but there should be no need for the information to be passed on to a third party.
- Confidential information about students should not be sent by email. Written information should be marked 'confidential'.
- There are exceptional circumstances in which there might be a need to break confidentiality without the student's consent:
 - If it is felt that there could be safety issues for the student, or for others
 - If there is a legal requirement to disclose information

For safety reasons, it is never a good idea to promise to keep information secret. Always reserve the right to break confidentiality in the circumstances outlined above.

Appendix C: Student Services and other services

The notes below are intended as guidelines and suggestions for academic staff when referring a student for support and guidance

Student Services

Careers Service

- A degree in itself will not be enough to guarantee a graduate job so encourage students to use the Careers Service from first year onwards. This gives them time to develop their employability skills.
- If a student is considering leaving QMUC before completing their degree, the Careers Service can discuss their options in a positive way and help with university or job applications if necessary.
- Students can explore their options in individual careers guidance interviews and continue their research in the Careers Library which is open Monday-Friday 9.00-4.30.
- Practical help with applications is available in workshops or individual interviews.
- Graduates can continue to use the Careers Service for up to two years after graduation. A Vacancy Bulletin is available on the Careers Service website.

QMConnect mentoring project:

- A broad range of mentors is available, so do highlight the scheme to new students. Mentees can benefit from either a friendly face round campus (building a sense of community and belonging) or a 'role model' (another mature student with kids) who they can relate to.
- The first 6 weeks of the term can be a crucial time for new students. Mentors can help mentees to recognise that this is a time of transition, acknowledge the hurdles along the way but demonstrate the support available.
- Encourage your tutees to get in touch early with the project co-ordinator to find out more about the scheme. That way, we can match them up appropriately.
- Feel free to encourage your students to consider becoming mentors. If there are students who you think would have something to offer, do encourage them to check out the scheme and its benefits. New mentor recruitment is from late February each year in preparation for September.

Counselling

If suggesting counselling, or explaining the system to the student, it's important to make clear that:

- The student has to make an appointment themselves– not anyone acting on their behalf, however well-intentioned
- There may be a waiting list – better to be aware of this sooner rather than later
- Any member of staff can contact the counsellor to discuss concerns about a student – but not when a student is, or becomes a client of the counsellor.
- If a PAT refers a student to counselling, and wants to check how things are going, this should be done through a meeting with the student, not the counsellor

Disability

In relation to students with disabilities:

- Please advise any disabled student who has not already done so to make an appointment to see the Disability Adviser as soon as possible in semester 1. Any student who suspects a disability should also be advised to contact the Adviser. This is crucial for arranging assessments, appropriate support arrangements, and funding applications for Disabled Students Allowances – which can take some time to sort out.
- The Academic Disabled Student Co-ordinator in each subject area is the key subject contact for queries or advice. It is vital that students are advised to make contact with their DSC as early as possible in Semester 1, following assessment and co-ordination with the Disability Adviser. The DSC will draw up an agreed individual learning plan to make reasonable adjustments (e.g. extra time in exams, copies of lecture notes etc).
- Students or staff may contact the disability adviser for advice about disability issues for students.

Finance

- Student funding arrives in 3 lots: start of semester 1, early January, and after Easter. The toughest time for students financially can be around March, before the last instalment arrives.
- When recommending application to the hardship fund, emphasise that the hardship committee meets once a month, and the dates/application forms are available in Student Services.

- Occasionally, a first instalment of loan is delayed, which is particularly stressful for new students. Small emergency payments can be made in this instance – a student in this position should be referred to the Finance Adviser to organise a quick payment.

Jobshop

- Many students have to work while they study. The Jobshop advertises part time, temporary and seasonal jobs as well as volunteering opportunities.
- An annual Jobs Fair is held in September where students can meet local employers and apply for part time jobs.

Medical Service:

- All students living in halls should be registered with the nurse.
- The nurse is at Corstorphine, Monday to Friday – 8.30-12.30
- Students living near the Leith campus should register with a local practice. Student Services can provide a list of these.

Student Learning Service:

- New students benefit from peer discussion about academic learning skills. Generic Learning Skills Workshops in semester 1 address a range of study strategies –informal group discussion and study tips
- The build-up to a first assignment can cause stress for new students, especially those who have not studied for a while. Students can make appointments to talk things through and receive guidance on planning and structuring assignments, as well as time management.
- Students at any level can benefit from time to reflect on and improve study strategies. Encourage any undergraduate who feels 'stuck' and in need of guidance, maybe in response to a new level of study, to get in touch.

Other Services

Library

- Do emphasise that students should familiarise themselves with the library early, before assignment pressures build up
- The enquiry desk is there for advice and support –students should contact us either in person, by email or phone.
- Urge students to explore the library catalogue i-link – it's a lot more than a catalogue and early familiarisation will improve research skills

Accommodation

- Problems with any aspect of accommodation can affect students as they try to settle in and focus on academic progress. The accommodation office at Corstorphine is the first point for students with any relevant queries. Students can then be referred on to other appropriate services, such as the Finance Adviser.

International Office

- The first contact point for practical support for international students, including finance and visa information

International Study Centre

- Short regular appointments can be made by students wanting extra support with their written English. Fifteen minute sessions provide guidance with grammar and phrasing.

Appendix D – Listening, questioning, and icebreakers

Improving listening and questioning skills

Effective listening, within a short PAT/student meeting, is really about allowing a student to feel able to voice concerns and explore options in an encouraging and non-judgmental atmosphere. We know that, for many students, adapting to infrequent contact with tutors is particularly difficult. Although all tutors use listening and questioning skills, it is worth developing a structure for a session which allows a student to feel 'someone here listens', even when contact time is limited. The techniques below are all worth bearing in mind, as they not only help pick up any early concerns which can affect student retention, but encourage students to develop confidence and independence in thinking through their own solutions next time.

- Paraphrasing a concern back to a student helps his/her sense that you are listening, and invites clarification
- Open questions encourage further exploration, and the voicing of the 'real' issue. E.g.

Could you say more about this?

What are your feelings about this?

What would you like to happen next?

- More specific 'closed' question, expecting a precise answer, are important for clarifying specifics

When did this happen?

How long will this take?

- A brief summing up of what has been said helps the student gain an overview, and ensures you are both clear about the key issues
- Talking through options is important, even when, in some cases, these may be limited. Although guidance and input from a PAT is important, students should be allowed to identify and think options through for themselves.

The ideas above help map out the progress of a possible brief meeting with a tutee. If a student needs further time and thought on an issue, it is probably best to arrange another brief meeting, although limits and deadlines, and a clear sense of the structure and what it allows, is more helpful than well-intentioned advice to 'take your time'.

(ideas adapted from: 'Personal Tutoring in Action' – Colin Lago and Geraldine Shipton, 1999)

Notes on using icebreakers for group meetings

The icebreaker is a key component of the first meeting, if a group. Students tell us how important initial social contacts are and how damaging it can be if these are not made. A well designed icebreaker should facilitate social contact and encourage an atmosphere where students can ask their own questions. Encouraging new students to talk and listen to each other is a quick and effective way of providing some basic reassurance that other students feel equally baffled/ unsure/ reassured by aspects of the transition. There are many possibilities for icebreakers and you'll probably have your own favourites but here are a few suggestions:

Once the introductions are over it's good to have an activity that allows the students to ask questions without having to expose what they may perceive as their lack of knowledge to the group. One, or a combination of the ideas below can help, depending on the time available:

- In pairs, think of two questions that you would really like answered by the end of the session
- Join up with another pair and see collectively which questions you can answer yourselves
- Put questions you're unsure about and/or don't know the answers to on a post-it and return it to the facilitator who can deal with them in the rest of the session.
- In pairs, think of one positive, and one not-so-positive experience from your first week or two. Feed back to group – PAT can comment or just encourage comparisons
- In pairs introduce yourself to your partner and then they introduce you to the group (this could be daunting for many new students – but useful to adapt in other tutorial contexts)
-

Whatever technique you use the key feature needs to be the active engagement of the students. Disseminating information from tutor to students can be comforting if you feel you've talked about all the important issues but we know that students will remember just a tiny fraction of what you say.

Appendix E: Diagrams and handouts

Diagrams

Diagram 1: Student PAT meeting – a visual guide

Diagram 2: Student Lifecycle model

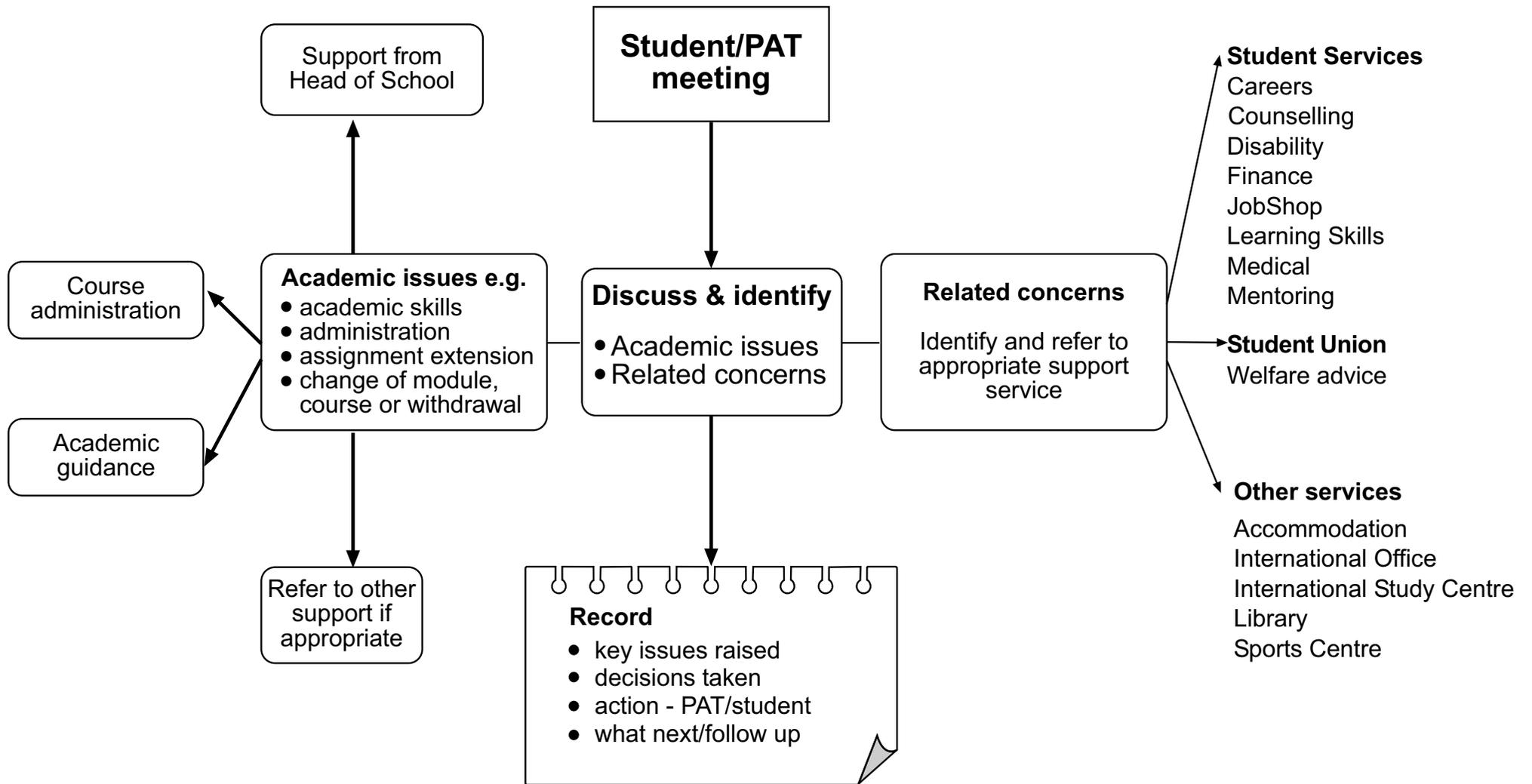
Handouts

NB each of these handouts is intended as a suggestion. We expect that you will want to customise them for use with your own students.

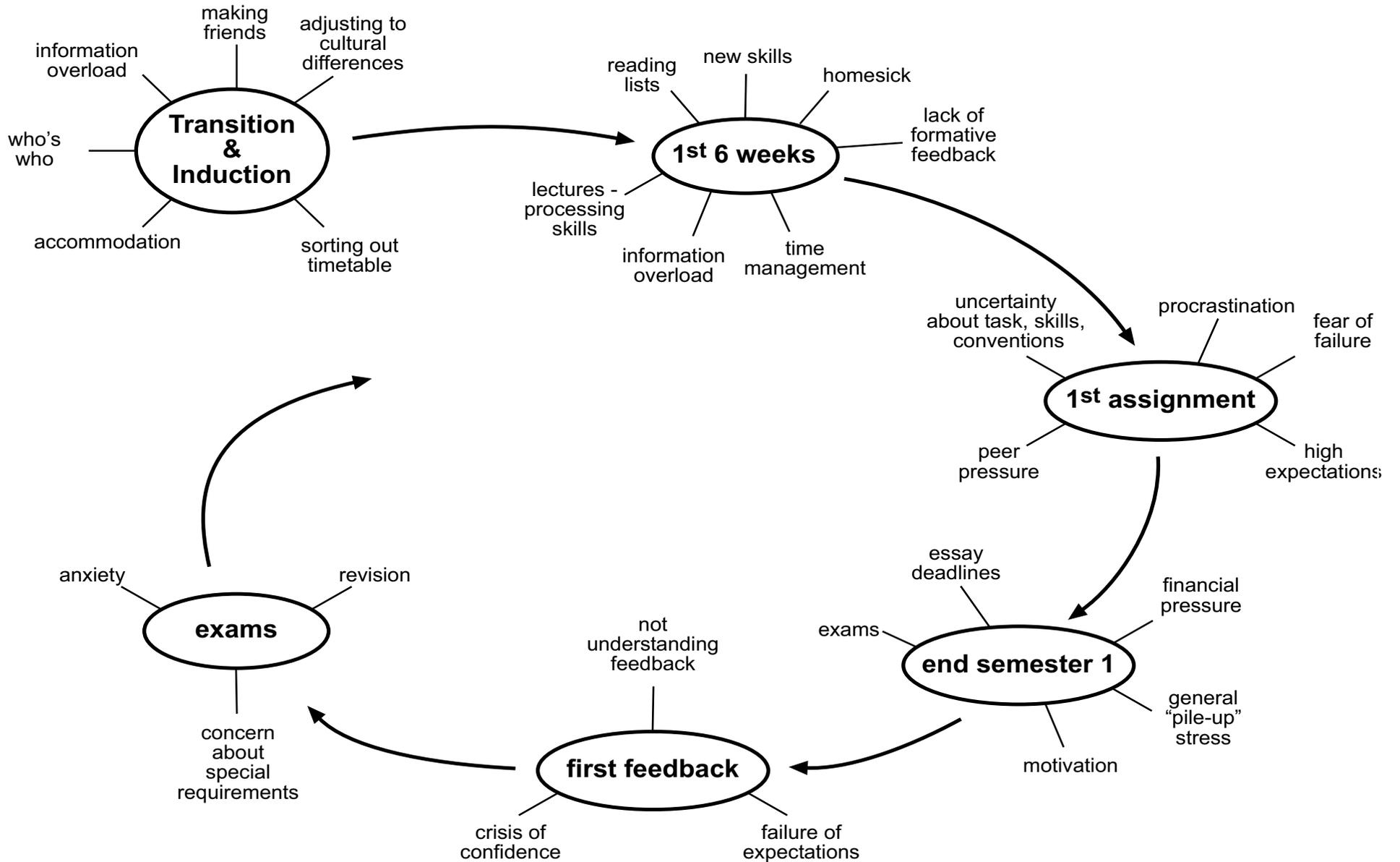
Handout 1: Expectations

Handout 2: Form for reflection before a tutorial.

Handout 3: Form to record tutorial meeting



Guide to Student PAT meeting



Student life cycle model

Handout 1: Expectations

What you can expect from your Personal Academic Tutor (PAT)

- To be a friendly and helpful first point of contact with the institution.
- To be source of advice and guidance on all matters relating to academic progress.
- To arrange a meeting at least once each semester.
- To keep an agreed record of meetings.
- To respect confidentiality.
- To make clear how they can be contacted for support and advice and be ready to meet with them on request
- That matters discussed with the PAT will be confidential except in instances where keeping confidentiality might result in harm to the student or others.
- To be aware of the broader network of support services at QMUC and to be ready to refer on when appropriate.
- To act as a link with other members of academic staff and as an advocate for the student in appropriate circumstances.

What your Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) expects from you

- To respond promptly to requests from their PAT for a meeting
- To respect the times which the PAT has said they will be available
- To be sure they know how best to contact their PAT in the event of an emergency
- To keep the PAT informed of circumstances that may have an effect on their studies
- To bring any agreed notes or information to meetings with their PAT

Handout 2: Reflection

Reflection is thinking for a purpose, it's about wanting to understand and develop the way you learn. To do this you need to evaluate, ask questions and make judgements.

Please spend a few minutes thinking about these questions. Jot down some notes and bring them with you to our meeting.

- What part of your studies has been the biggest challenge so far?
 - Why do you think this is?

- What has been the best part of your experience as a student at QMUC and why?

- Identify two skills that you feel are important to your studies and that you'd like to improve.

Handout 3: Record of tutorial meeting

Date:

Name of student:

Issues raised:

Action points for tutor:

Action points for student:

Agreed by: (student)

..... (tutor)

Reference list

Cannell, P. 2005. *Evaluation of induction*. Edinburgh: Queen Margaret University College.

Earwaker, J. 1992. *Helping and supporting students: rethinking the issues*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Lago, C and Shipton, G. 1999. *Personal tutoring in action*. 2nd Ed. Sheffield: The University of Sheffield Counselling Service.