



University  
of Dundee

# ADVISER OF STUDIES HANDBOOK (STAFF)

**Academic Year 2023/24**

Last updated August 2023

This page left intentionally blank



## Contents

1	Introduction .....	1
2	The academic advising role .....	2
2.1	Roles and responsibilities of an Adviser of Studies .....	2
2.1.1	Meeting with students.....	2
2.2	School responsibilities .....	2
2.2.1	Minimum requirement.....	2
2.2.2	Adviser of Studies forum.....	2
2.2.3	Senior Advisers of studies.....	3
2.3	Advising Students .....	3
2.3.1	Initial meeting .....	3
2.3.2	Subsequent meetings.....	3
2.3.3	Group meetings .....	3
2.3.4	Record keeping.....	4
2.3.5	Availability.....	4
2.3.6	Communicating with advisees .....	4
3	Common academic concerns .....	5
3.1	Programme or Module Choice .....	5
3.2	Monitoring Attendance and Engagement .....	5
3.3	Academic Progress, Grades and Feedback.....	5
3.4	General Academic Wellbeing .....	6
3.5	Failed Assignments, Resits and Appeals.....	6
4	Common pastoral concerns .....	7
4.1	Mental Health and Anxiety.....	7
4.2	Disability .....	8
4.3	Financial Issues .....	8
4.4	Accommodation Issues .....	8
4.5	University Support Services.....	8
4.6	DUSA Support Services .....	9
5	Equality, diversity and inclusion .....	10
5.1	Advising Undergraduate Students.....	10
5.2	Advising Articulation Students.....	10
5.3	Advising Taught Postgraduate Students .....	11
5.4	Advising International Students.....	11
5.5	Advising Distance Learning Students.....	12
5.6	Advising Mature Students.....	12
	Appendix 1: Adviser of Studies student action sheet.....	13
	Appendix 2: Senior Adviser of Studies job description .....	14

---

Appendix 3: Academic pastoral support sheet.....15

This page left intentionally blank



## 1 Introduction

This handbook sets out the University of Dundee's standards and requirements for student advising, identifies common issues that may arise when advising students, and offers advice and further links to help Advisers of Studies to carry out the role.

Section 2 of the Handbook outlines the role of the Adviser of Studies, as well as identifying School-level responsibilities in the advising process. It also introduces some basic guidelines for meetings with students.

Section 3 identifies some of the common academic issues that might arise when advising students, and offers some guidance for responding to such matters, whilst Section 4 identifies common pastoral issues and signposts University support services and processes in these areas.

Recognising the increasingly diverse nature of the student body, Section 5 outlines the University's policy on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the context of the adviser role and explores some of the challenges which may emerge when advising different types of students.

The information in this handbook sets out base-level expectations and guidance but allows for the fact that Schools and individual advisers may approach the task in a range of different ways. It is important therefore that the guidance here is considered in conjunction with School policy and with other relevant University regulations.

## 2 The academic advising role

The Adviser of Studies acts as a point of contact for individual students, often for the duration of their degree. As such, Advisers play an essential role in enhancing the student experience, supporting retention, progression and attainment, and ensuring the general academic and pastoral wellbeing of the students they advise.

### 2.1 Roles and responsibilities of an Adviser of Studies

The principal role of the Adviser of Studies is to provide their advisees with academic support throughout their studies. This may include offering guidance on and approval of course or module choices or changes, supporting academic and career development planning, or simply helping their advisees to understand and navigate their way through their course. Some of the more common areas of academic support are discussed in more detail in Section 3.

In addition to an academic role, Advisers also have an important part to play in the pastoral well-being of their advisees. The University has a duty of care to all of its students, and as someone who meets individual students on a regular basis, the Adviser may be well placed to identify any pastoral or well-being concerns, or to notice changes in a student's academic performance or general demeanour.

As a named contact within the University students may often view their Adviser as the person to reach out to for both academic **and** pastoral support. In terms of the latter however, it is important to be aware of the limits of your responsibility. Advisers should therefore have a good and up-to-date understanding of the University's support services and processes, and know how to refer their advisees to these services as appropriate (see Section 4).

#### 2.1.1 Meeting with students

Advisers should normally meet with their students on a minimum of two occasions in the first semester of study (or once for part-time students), and thereafter a minimum of one occasion per semester. These are minimum guidelines and it is recognised that that some Schools or individual advisers may wish to offer further contact. In addition, advisers may need to respond to further *ad hoc* meeting requests from their students.

## 2.2 School responsibilities

Individual Advisers should be supported by appropriate structures and processes within their School.

### 2.2.1 Minimum requirement

It is recognised that the specific demands of different academic disciplines mean that the role of Adviser of Studies may differ in practice across or even within Schools but the following minimum provision is recommended. Schools/Discipline areas should ensure:

- appropriate allocation of students to Advisers of Studies;
- proper administration of the Adviser of Studies system within the School or Discipline
- adequate time to undertake the Adviser role is allocated within the workload model. Current University guidance is that Advisers should be allocated a minimum of 2 hours for each advisee per year in their workload model;
- Advisers of Studies are properly supported and trained;
- students are provided with clear information about the purpose and operation of the Advisers of Studies scheme via handbooks and other sources;
- allocation of an alternative Adviser of Study in the long-term absence of the assigned Adviser;
- processes for monitoring student attendance, submission of work and progress more generally, and the issuing of formal warnings where necessary, should include input from Advisers of Studies.

### 2.2.2 Adviser of Studies forum

Every School is expected to develop an Adviser of Studies Forum which should meet each semester and should be chaired by the School's Senior Adviser (see below).

### 2.2.3 Senior Advisers of studies

Every School/Division is expected to appoint at least one Senior Adviser of Studies to co-ordinate advising within the School. Larger and/or more diverse Schools may choose to appoint more than one Senior Adviser. See Appendix 2 for a full description of the Senior Adviser role.

A list of the current Senior Advisers for each School can be found in the Staff section of the Academic Skills Centre Resources. [Visit page](#)

## 2.3 Advising Students

### 2.3.1 Initial meeting

The initial meeting with new advisees will usually take place in Welcome Week (Week 0) or Week 1 and should be arranged through the processes and channels in place within the individual School. If for any reason this is not possible (for example if the student is late arriving), this initial meeting should be held as soon as possible.

The initial meeting is an important one. The student is likely to have many questions and doubts as they adjust to their new environment, and meeting their Adviser can provide reassurance and support at this time. The exact nature of these meetings is likely to vary according to individual circumstances, but it is likely that the meeting will include some or all of the following:

- Discussion and approval of module choices
- An explanation of the advising role, its purpose and its limitations.
- Clear expectation-setting in terms of how the relationship will work;
- Agreement as to how Adviser and advisee will communicate with each other;
- Answering any questions the student may have at this stage and, where appropriate, signposting other services around the University.

It is also recommended that a time and date is agreed at this stage for the next meeting, sometime during the first semester. This will provide a degree of reassurance to the student and allow them to prepare for the next meeting.

### 2.3.2 Subsequent meetings

Beyond the initial meeting for new students, Advisers are required to meet with all of their advisees at least once per semester. The content of these meetings will depend greatly on the students' level of study, progress, and individual needs. However, the following are suggested as common discussion points for subsequent meetings:

- Academic progress, including assessment and feedback;
- Academic planning, such as module choice for subsequent year;
- Opportunities to develop academic or graduate attributes;
- Any pastoral support needs that may arise.

Students may also wish to discuss career plans with their Adviser. The University's [Careers Service](#) offers bespoke information sessions for any Adviser of Studies who would like to know more about the services available, and students may also be referred directly for advice and guidance, potential internship opportunities, and information about events and workshops.

### 2.3.3 Group meetings

It is recognised that in Schools or Disciplines with very large numbers of students, a group approach to advising may be deemed necessary or desirable. Indeed, there are potential benefits to the students in this approach, in terms of building up a network of peer support. Where Schools or Disciplines do take a group approach, the following points should be considered:

- Group meetings should not be used as a means of reducing the amount of time allocated per student – even where group meetings are employed, the overall required workload allocation remains 2 hours per student per academic year.



- Group sizes should be kept as small as possible – the effectiveness of such an approach is likely to become compromised if groups are too large;
- Some students may be less comfortable in a group situation and may therefore become alienated from the advising process;
- Many students will be uncomfortable raising personal issues in a group environment – it is essential that it's made clear to students that they may also contact their Adviser to arrange an individual meeting.

#### 2.3.4 Record keeping

The way in which Adviser of Studies meetings are recorded is a matter to be agreed at School level, and Advisers should seek advice from their School's Senior Adviser of Studies if they are unsure what to do in this regard.

There are a number of advantages to keeping good records of meetings with advisees:

- They can provide a point of reference for future meetings;
- They can act as an *aide-memoire* should you be asked to provide a reference for that student in the future;
- Students can be empowered to take ownership of the advising process by asking *them* to provide the record of the meeting – an example template for this can be found in Appendix 1.

Bear in mind that any records should be kept and processed in line with the University's [Data Protection Policy](#) and GDPR requirements.

#### 2.3.5 Availability

In addition to meeting a minimum of once per semester, it is likely that there will be occasions where advisees wish to contact or meet with Advisers on an *ad hoc* basis, if they have a specific query or an issue that is causing them distress.

Advisers should be available, within reason, to meet with their students either on campus or virtually as appropriate, and to respond to emails in a timely manner during the academic session.

Where appropriate, Advisers may wish to highlight their scheduled Office Hours as an opportunity for advisees to speak to them outside of the scheduled meetings.

It is recommended that expectations around availability and communication are discussed and agreed during the initial meeting with advisees.

#### 2.3.6 Communicating with advisees

It is important that Advisers make clear to advisees the appropriate modes of communication and Advisers of Studies should encourage their students to use and check their University email frequently. Students are instructed to use their University email accounts for University business but in this increasingly cluttered digital landscape many do not. This can result in students missing important information about their courses, including communications about Adviser of Studies appointments.

If a student does not respond to your email or misses an arranged appointment, it is appropriate to send one reminder, especially with respect to first year students, but excessive time should not be spent chasing students who have chosen not to attend meetings or who have missed or ignored emails, as long as Advisers continue to be reasonably available.

Note the practice of communicating with students at their personal email accounts is not recommended for data protection reasons. However, there may be occasions when it is appropriate to use a student personal email, at the Adviser's discretion. If in doubt, Advisers should consult with their School's Senior Adviser of Studies for further guidance.

### 3 Common academic concerns

The primary role of an Adviser of Studies is to guide and support students through their academic journey. Some students will require little academic support; others may present with multiple and sometime complex needs. Some of the more common academic issues which Advisers may need to address are outlined in the remainder of this section.

#### 3.1 Programme or Module Choice

The initial meeting with an advisee, should where appropriate, include discussion and agreement on the student's module choices. Some students may subsequently express concern as to whether they have chosen the right module(s) or programme of study, particularly in the early stages of study. This can often subside as they settle into the course or module, and part of an Adviser's role may be to provide reassurance at this stage and to discourage the student from making rushed decisions.

However, there may be more significant reasons that a student is dissatisfied with their course, creating the risk of disengagement and failure to progress. It's important that the Adviser takes time with the student to fully explore the underlying issues and all potential solutions and, where appropriate, to guide the student as regards their options within the School for changing modules or courses.

#### 3.2 Monitoring Attendance and Engagement

Advisers of Study have an important role to play in supporting students' attendance and engagement, and may be expected to intervene as part of their School's response when a student's attendance falls below the required threshold. All Schools are required to implement the University's [Student attendance and engagement policy](#) and will have mechanisms in place for identifying non-attendance.

In the case of international students studying at the University, a certain level of attendance may be a condition of their visa, with potentially serious consequences should they fail to maintain that level (see 5.3 below).

In most cases attendance is now recorded automatically *via* the [SEAtS app](#). As with any technology, there can sometimes be technical issues which can cause distress to students. In addition, less digitally-confident students may have some anxiety about using the app. A good working knowledge of SEAtS and of the contingency plans within their School in the event of technical problems will help Advisers to offer guidance and reassurance to their students in this area.

The Distance Learning Forum can offer further support around attendance (and other issues) to Advisers involved with Online Distance Learners.

Poor or decreasing attendance and engagement can be a warning sign for other non-academic issues. When discussing poor attendance with a student, it is important that the Adviser attempts to establish whether there are underlying issues for which the student may receive additional support (see Section 4).

Whilst specific cases of poor attendance should be automatically flagged up to Advisers through School attendance monitoring processes, it is sensible to include brief discussion of general attendance and engagement as part of any routine meeting with advisees and, in particular at the first meeting with new students, to stress the importance of good attendance to academic success.

#### 3.3 Academic Progress, Grades and Feedback

Academic performance is likely to be one of the main topics students wish to discuss with their advisers throughout their time at the University.

In the early stages of their studies, students are likely to have many questions about how they will be assessed and may benefit from advice on a range of related topics, from understanding marking criteria and the alpha-numeric scale to more practical things such as how to submit assignments, the School's mitigating circumstances policy, and so on.

As they become more familiar with these basic elements of assessment, they may welcome support in understanding and acting on feedback or signposting to support services such as the [Academic Skills Centre](#) (ASC) and the [Library and Learning Centre](#) (LLC).

Advisers have a particularly important role to play where a student fails an assignment or generally performs poorly in assessment. Identifying academic issues as early as possible and putting the appropriate support in place, including referring the student to University support services where appropriate, will clearly be of great benefit to the student.

### 3.4 General Academic Wellbeing

In addition to supporting academic performance, Advisers have a potentially important role to play in ensuring their advisee's general academic wellbeing.

This may, for example, involve helping students to understand how to get the most out of a particular type of learning environment, discussing any difficulties they may be having with tutors or fellow students, or ensuring that they understand the need to think beyond their assignments and the grades they receive and develop an intellectual curiosity in the discipline they have chosen to study.

### 3.5 Failed Assignments, Resits and Appeals

Failed assignments can be a source of significant distress for students. Advisers of Studies can be a rich source of support and counsel at such times. The most important thing is to try and help the student understand why they have failed the assignment, and to signpost them to the most suitable source(s) of support.

New students or those studying in the UK for the first time can often struggle to understand elements of the academic culture such as criticality, academic ethics, or referencing. Helping students to adjust to new challenges such as these is a key element of the Adviser role.

Advisees may also benefit from advice on how to negotiate practicalities such as mitigating circumstances, resubmissions, or appeals. A thorough understanding of University and School policies and procedures in these areas will allow Advisers to support students effectively and efficiently in such instances.

## 4 Common pastoral concerns

Whilst the primary role of the Adviser of Studies is to offer academic support, Advisers increasingly also need to be ready to field general pastoral queries and ensure that students who are experiencing difficulties are supported through referral to the appropriate professional service(s). This can be achieved through:

- providing basic pastoral support to students;
- maintaining awareness of sources of support available at School and University level and from DUSA, and referring students to these services as appropriate.

Exactly what constitutes 'basic pastoral support' will be down to the individual, although Adviser's must be careful not to offer support where they feel they are uncomfortable or ill-equipped to do so, or where there is a need for appropriate professional intervention. If in doubt, Advisers should consult their Senior Adviser of Studies for further guidance.

That said, students will not always separate academic and pastoral concerns (nor is it always possible to do so) and will often view their Adviser of Studies as the appropriate contact for all such issues. Advisers therefore need to be aware of some of the more common types of pastoral issues which might be raised and have an overview of the extensive support structures in place within their School and across the University as a whole.

### 4.1 Mental Health and Anxiety

Student mental health is one of the primary challenges faced across Higher Education. Whilst by no means confined to the sector, the particular set of circumstances - such as being away from home, the pressure to do well in assessment, or the challenges of juggling study with other commitments such as work or family - means that University does create an environment where maintaining mental well-being can be particularly challenging for some students.

Where a student presents with mental health issues, which may manifest in terms of reporting stress or anxiety, Advisers can play an important role in helping that student and ensuring they receive the support they require.

As well as simply being someone the student may feel comfortable talking to about such issues, Advisers may be in a position to offer practical advice which could help students to, for example, cope with workload and strike an appropriate work life balance.

It is important however, that Advisers do not attempt to offer support where they are uncomfortable doing so or where professional assistance is required. The University has significant support structures in place and part of the Adviser role is recognising when to refer students on to the appropriate service.

Note however that Advisers must respect the confidentiality of information shared by students, including information related to disclosure of a mental health difficulty. Such information should remain confidential and should not be discussed with staff or other parties without explicit consent from the student, unless there are concerns for the safety of the student or others, or where the University is required by law to act.

Advisers should be aware of the University's [Get help with mental health](#) page which signposts to the appropriate University services in this area as well as offering useful advice which Advisers may wish to pass on to students.

Advisers may also find it helpful to familiarise themselves with the [University procedure for students or staff in mental distress](#), which provides clear advice on steps to take if you're concerned about the immediate safety of a student. See section 5.4 for advice on distance learners studying outside of the U.K.

## 4.2 Disability

Students may wish to discuss with their Adviser of Study any disability which they feel may impact their ability to study successfully at the University. As with mental health issues (see 4.1), Advisers must treat any such conversations as confidential unless they have the explicit consent of the students. However, all students reporting a disability should be strongly advised to register with [Disability Services](#) as soon as possible to ensure that individual support arrangements can be made in a timely manner.

It's important that Advisers of Studies are aware of the requirements of any advisees who are registered for disability support, such as reasonable adjustments for dyslexia or sensory impairment. This enables the Adviser to check with the student during regular meetings that the adjustments are working as they should and to deal with any potential issues which may arise.

The University's Disability Service provides advice to all staff on supporting disabled students including making reasonable adjustments in teaching and assessment. Each School, and in some cases individual disciplines, have their own [Disability Support Officer](#) who should be the first point of contact for Advisers with queries regarding student disability.

## 4.3 Financial Issues

Financial issues are an increasingly common concern for students, and can affect a student's work and general well-being. Students in serious financial difficulty should be encouraged to contact the [Enquiry Centre](#) in [Student Services](#).

Another common issue relates to students balancing their studies with part-time or even full-time work. It is not uncommon for students to work up 20 hours or more per week in order to support themselves through university. In such cases, students may benefit from discussion with their Advisers around work/life balance, time management, and planning.

## 4.4 Accommodation Issues

Advisers may be approached by students, particularly in the early stages of their study, with issues regarding accommodation. Problems finding suitable accommodation, or issues with existing accommodation or flatmates, can have a significant negative effect on students' academic performance and general well-being. Again, Advisers should be sympathetic and should refer the student to the [Enquiry Centre](#), who will direct them to the most appropriate support service(s).

## 4.5 University Support Services

The University has a range of services available to support students in both the academic and pastoral aspects of the student experience.

On the academic side, Advisers may wish to familiarise themselves with the services offered by the [Academic Skills Centre](#), the [Careers Service](#), [English for International Students](#), the [Library and Learning Centre](#), and [Digital Technology Services](#).

In terms of pastoral issues, the Student Services Directorate offers a range of support, including many of the services mentioned elsewhere in this handbook. Advisers may wish to familiarise themselves with the [Stay on Course](#) support programme.

The other key service to be aware of is the [Enquiry Centre](#), which is located on Campus Green and may also be reached by email. Students may be referred to the Enquiry Centre where their query will be triaged and the appropriate support service(s) alerted.

The [Student Services webpage](#) includes a link to a downloadable *A to Z helpful guide* for students (scroll to bottom of page) which lists up to date information and contact details for every support service offered by the University. Advisers may find it helpful to have a copy of this guide to hand, and to ensure that their advisees are aware of the guide.

## 4.6 DUSA Support Services

When students matriculate, they automatically become a member of the Dundee University Students' Association (DUSA). DUSA can offer support and advice in a number of areas related to a student's course or wider University experience. Although there is a great deal of collaboration between the two, DUSA is completely independent of the University and exists to represent and support the student body and there may be occasions when Advisers feel it is appropriate to recommend that a student seeks their independent advice.

Advisers can read more about the kind of support DUSA can offer on their [website](#).

## 5 Equality, diversity and inclusion

Whilst the advice in the previous sections of this handbook is intended to be useful to all Advisers, the increasingly diverse nature of the student body means that there can never be a one-size-fits-all approach to advising. This section will outline some of the different types of student that advisers may find themselves working with and attempt to identify broad issues which may be specific or particularly relevant to this type of student.

The advice here is not exhaustive and should be used in conjunction with existing University policies and regulations. It is particularly important that all staff, including Advisers, are familiar with University requirements around [equality diversity and inclusion](#). Advisers may also wish to familiarise themselves with the University's [safeguarding policy](#).

### 5.1 Advising Undergraduate Students

Much of the advice in this handbook was initially developed with undergraduate students in mind and is therefore likely to be particularly relevant to this type of student.

Perhaps the key distinguishing feature of advising undergraduate students is the duration of the relationship, should the student have the same Adviser throughout their studies. This means that what the student needs from their Adviser is likely to evolve over several years. At the beginning of their studies, undergraduate students may rely on their Adviser to help them make the transition into university education. As their studies progress, they may rely on their Adviser for advice on how to get the most out of their academic work. Towards the end of their studies, they may lean on their Adviser for career advice. Even after the student has graduated, it is very common for the Adviser to be asked to provide a reference for employment.

As with the previous advice in this handbook, Advisers should not feel pressured to provide support in areas in which they are not comfortable but should be able to pass students on to the appropriate support service.

Given the long-term nature of the relationship between an undergraduate student and their Adviser, challenges can arise should a member of staff leave or take on new duties, leading to another Adviser taking on the role midway through the student's course. The student may have developed a strong working relationship with their previous Adviser, so some thought should be given as to how both the student and their new Adviser can effectively manage the transition.

### 5.2 Advising Articulation Students

Articulation students are another group who may bring with them specific challenges over and above those already discussed more generally. Like other groups, articulation students face the challenge of transitioning into university life but may find this more difficult than their fellow students because they will be joining preformed cohorts who have already spent a year going through this process and forming peer relationships.

As well as these more pastoral consequences of missing out on the first years of study, articulation students are sometimes found to have a skills deficit as a result of having missed out on the course content from that first year. They may be perfectly able to cope with the material currently being covered but are disadvantaged because they do not have that base knowledge from the previous year.

Advisers should be aware of these potential issues and should seek to support articulation students in this potentially difficult transition into advanced years of study.

### 5.3 Advising Taught Postgraduate Students

In contrast to undergraduate students, one of the main challenges facing taught postgraduate (PGT) students is the compressed time scale, with most taught master's courses having a duration of 12 months. This makes it more difficult for Advisers to build up longer-term professional relationship with their students and also creates extra pressure for the students in terms of the accelerated nature of the learning.

In particular, this can leave students feeling like they have less of a settling-in period and that they must be performing to a high standard from the outset, creating extra pressure and potential for stress and anxiety. One of the key roles of the Adviser is to help the student settle into the academic culture as quickly as possible whilst also trying to manage expectations.

The challenges of the short-term nature of a master's course can be exacerbated by late arrival on the part of the student. In such cases it can often be difficult for the student to catch up with the rest of the cohort, particularly as they will have missed important induction activities. As such, one priority for the Adviser in such situations would be to help the student where possible get up to speed with the rest of their cohort.

Many PGT students arriving at the University will be international students. This cohort face additional challenges, particularly in the early stages of their studies, which will be explored in the next section.

Advisers should also be mindful of the fact that PGT students will have a third semester, usually in the summer months, where they may benefit from at least one meeting, particularly if they are working on a dissertation or major project.

### 5.4 Advising International Students

As mentioned in the previous section, international students now make up a significant portion of the PGT population (although most of the advice in this section also applies to undergraduate international students as well).

One of the major challenges international students face is adjusting to the UK academic culture, which may be very different from that in which they have previously studied. Students would benefit from any initial meeting with their Adviser including a discussion of some of these key factors, such as academic ethics, referencing, and critical thinking, as well as signposting to School and University induction events and resources which can support them in making this transition.

Research suggests that there is a significant period of adjustment to any new academic culture for international students. Allied to the compressed timescale of a master's degree, this can be a source of significant difficulty and anxiety for international students, and the support of Advisers at this time is essential. Signposting to services such as English for International Students (EIS), the Academic Skills Centre (ASC) and the Library and Learning Centre (LLC) can also be useful steps at this stage.

International students can be particularly affected by the issue of late arrival mentioned in the previous section. This can often be down to delays in the student receiving their visa. Advisers should be particularly attentive to this type of situation so that they can help the student to catch up.

Advisers should also be aware that there are strict attendance conditions attached to the granting of student visas. Mechanisms for ensuring attendance will be in place at School level, but the Adviser has a role to play in reinforcing to the student the importance of attendance and in meeting and supporting the student in cases where this is proving a problem.

Please note however the Advisers **should not** offer any advice on visa issues themselves. There are complex legal requirements which must be adhered to and queries regarding visas should be passed on to the University's [Immigration Compliance](#) team.

Advisers should also be aware that some of the pastoral issues covered in Section 4 can particularly affect international students, most notably issues around accommodation and employment.



## 5.5 Advising Distance Learning Students

Some Advisers may find themselves working with distance learning students. Many of the factors already discussed will be relevant in some way to distance learning students as well but there may also be some unique factors to consider.

On a practical level, give consideration to the location of the student when arranging meetings. Many distance learning students are also international students, so the time difference should be taken into account when scheduling appointments.

Distance learning students may also be particularly likely to be working, possibly full-time, further adding to scheduling difficulties but also meaning that these students may face particular challenges around work/life balance. Advisers may wish to ensure students are finding sufficient time to engage with their course and that they are able to attend scheduled online workshops or live events.

Students may also benefit from discussing with their Adviser issues around autonomy and time management and how to manage the process of online working. One particular challenge for this type of student can be a sense of detachment from the University. Adviser meetings are one of the key ways in which these students can build a sense of belonging, but are also important in terms of ensuring that students are able to engage more widely with their course and their fellow students.

It should also be noted that some of the University's support services may not be available to students studying outside of the U.K. For example, very urgent support for mental health issues should be provided by services local to the student. Staff in the Enquiry Centre (see 4.5 above) can advise further.

## 5.6 Advising Mature Students

Advisers may also wish to consider some specific factors when working with mature students. For example, such students are more likely to have outside commitments such as work, family, or caring duties, and as such would benefit from early discussion with their Adviser on time management and work/life balance.

While it's not always the case, mature students are also more likely to have been out of education for a considerable period of time, and therefore may find the transition into university education particularly challenging. Patient support and advice from their Adviser will help them to manage this transition and to settle into university study.

Another common issue with mature students is a sense of imposter syndrome. This can be particularly acute when mature students find themselves surrounded by much younger fellow students. A related danger is where these younger students lean too heavily upon the mature student, for example allowing them to do all the work in a tutorial or in a group assignment. Advisers can allay these fears by helping mature students to recognise the unique skill sets and experiences that they bring with them to university, and in general by reassuring them that mature students are a valued and important part of the student body.

## Appendix 1: Adviser of Studies student action sheet

Student Name:

Adviser of Studies:

Date of Meeting:

Following discussion with your adviser what priority have you agreed?

What actions are required to address your agreed priority? What is the timeline?

What have you achieved since the last meeting?

What if any were the barriers? What would you have done differently?

How has this helped you?

## Appendix 2: Senior Adviser of Studies job description

In spring 2018 an internal audit of academic advising was carried out. One of the recommendations of the audit was to extend the good practice of having a Senior Adviser (or more than one as appropriate to context) to all Schools. In introducing such a role in each School it was agreed that, following consultation, it would be appropriate to have a single job description<sup>1</sup>.

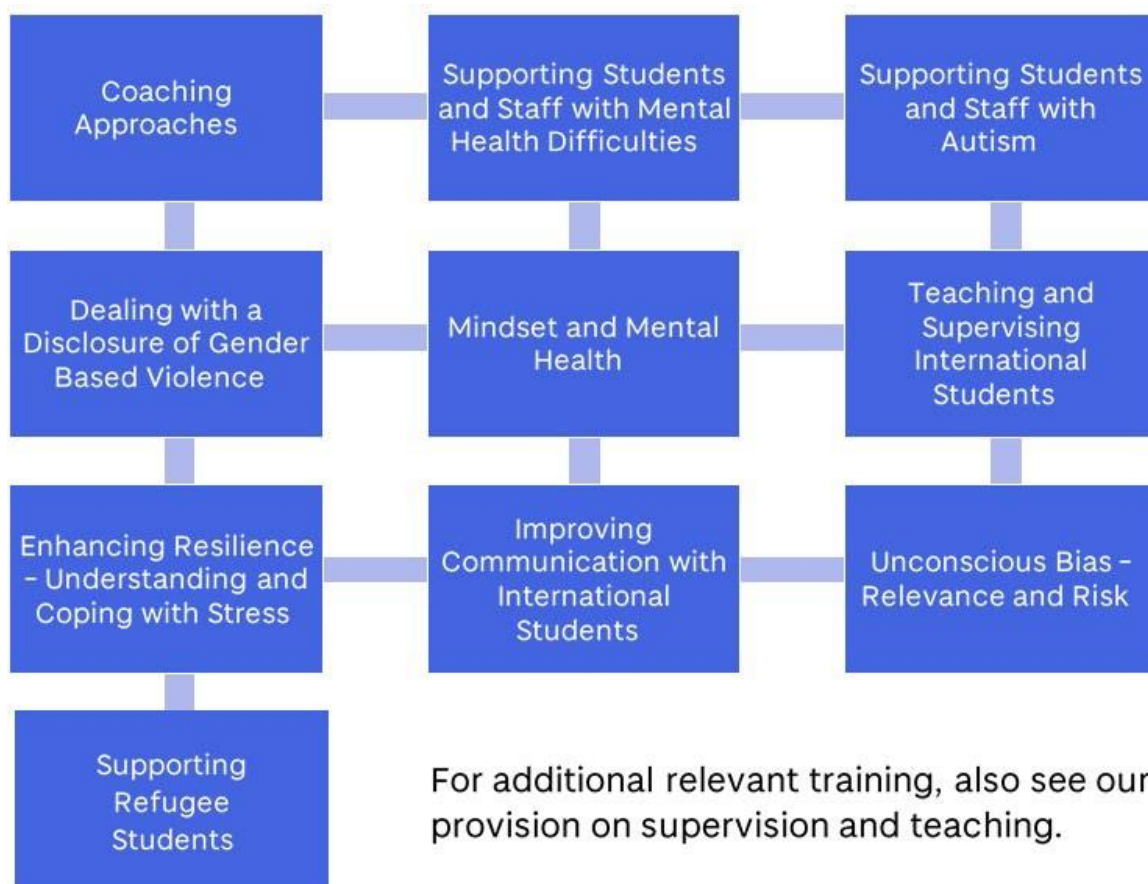
- To act as a point of contact for Advisers within the School.
- To provide support and guidance for School Advisers in their role (see below).
- Be cognisant of the impact of the role of Adviser of Studies on colleagues' health and wellbeing.
- To act as a co-ordinating point for general communication between the School and the relevant Professional Services and DUSA support services.
- To act as a second point of contact for a student in the event of the allocated Adviser's absence from the University, and in the event of complicated issues.
- To report to the School Learning & Teaching Committee through an annual evaluation of the operation of the Advising system within the School.
- To coordinate and chair the School Adviser of Studies forum (which should meet each semester or at least annually).
- To consider requests by students to change their Adviser, as appropriate.
- To attend and be an active participant in the University of Dundee Senior Adviser of Study network and Adviser of Studies forum.
- To work with the School Office Lead (or equivalent) to ensure key Adviser of Studies policies (such as attendance monitoring actions) are in place and operating effectively.
- To engage in recommended development opportunities provided through the OPD programme aimed at Advisers of Studies (and those specifically aimed at Senior Advisers), and to encourage advising colleagues to engage also.
- Be proactive in sharing good practice across the School and University

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on 'Guidelines for Advising' (n.d.) University of Manchester September 2020

## Appendix 3: Academic pastoral support sheet

### Further Support



The curated pathway above, from OPD, contains recommended training for academic staff such as Advisers of Studies in roles which mean they have special responsibilities for the pastoral support and wellbeing of students.

For further information on support available to students we recommend that you visit the Student Services website or contact the [Enquiry Centre](#) For information on disability related issues affecting students, you can find out more from [Disability Services](#)

For further information on support in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion related issues go to Equality [Diversity and Inclusion](#)

[Corporate Parenting](#) is a policy to support you in an advisory capacity

This handbook is updated regularly by the Academic Skills Centre.

Last update August 2023.

Feedback is welcome and should be sent to [asc@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:asc@dundee.ac.uk)



University  
of Dundee

University of Dundee

Nethergate

Dundee

DD1 4HN

t: +44 (0)1382 383000

e: [dundee.ac.uk](mailto:dundee.ac.uk)