

Personal Academic Tutoring

The University of Northampton



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Welcome

Personal Academic Tutoring is integral to the University of Northampton's holistic approach to supporting student success. Personal Academic Tutors, or 'PATs', provide an extra layer of academic and pastoral support, beyond what is offered by the module tutor and programme leader, to an assigned number of students.

The PAT serves as a central figure in a student's university experience. As such, it is important that we find ways to support and enhance the Personal Academic Tutoring provision across the University and in partnership with other institutions. This booklet provides an overview of the PAT Role and the sources of support available to PATs to help them perform this key role.

Additionally, this booklet includes several short case studies highlighting different approaches to Personal Academic Tutoring at the University of Northampton. From these case studies, it is possible to extract a set of guiding principles for Personal Academic Tutoring that can be used to inform the systematic enhancement of this provision.

We hope the contents of the booklet are meaningful to your own practice and, ultimately, in supporting our students to achieve their personal, academic and professional goals.

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The Role of the PAT

The Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) role is integral to the University of Northampton's holistic approach to supporting student success. PATs provide an extra layer of academic and pastoral support, beyond what is offered by the module tutor and programme leader, to an assigned number of students (Wheeler and Birtle, 1995). PATs play a vital role in supporting the first year experience, in enabling students to engage in personal development planning and in encouraging students to consider their employability. In all of these ways, the PAT serves as a central figure in a student's university experience. Table 1, overleaf, outlines the areas of responsibility that are indicative of the role of the PAT at the University of Northampton.

Who is a PAT?

The PAT role is performed by Academic Staff who are School-based (as opposed to Academic Staff who are based within administrative departments). Programme Leaders typically oversee PAT allocation (i.e. assigning tutees to PATs each year). Programme Leaders also and manage and monitor the Personal Academic Tutoring system for the whole programme throughout the academic year.

The Personal Academic Tutoring Policy

The purpose of the PAT Policy is threefold.

1. To inform students of the expectations and processes around personal academic tutoring at the University of Northampton
2. To support all academic staff in the facilitation of personal academic tutoring across the University
3. To outline, for other relevant staff and stakeholders, the personal academic tutoring processes of the University

The PAT Policy establishes a minimum acceptable level of provision of, student engagement in and institutional support of Personal Academic Tutoring. This policy is reviewed each year. The most recent version of the PAT Policy can be accessed on Policies and Procedures page of the [University website](http://www.northamptonilt.com/pat) or by visiting the PAT web area: www.northamptonilt.com/pat.

PAT training and development

Training and development opportunities are available to PATs through the University's HEA-accredited professional development framework, C@N-DO. To learn more about C@N-DO events and to register, visit the Institute of Learning and Teaching website: www.northampton.ac.uk/ilt.

Resources, including this booklet, are available for PATs at the PAT web area: www.northamptonilt.com/pat. This site includes videos, links to the PAT policy, findings from PAT surveys, links to University sources of support for students and for PATs, information about PAT development events and educational resources to help PATs facilitate group and individual tutorials.

Table 1: Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) Role Description¹

The Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) role is integral to the University of Northampton's holistic approach to supporting student success. PATs provide an extra layer of academic and pastoral support, beyond what is offered by the module tutor and programme leader, to an assigned number of students². Beyond what is encouraged as part of the academic programme, PATs enable students to engage in personal development planning and encourage students to consider their employability. In all of these ways, the PAT serves as a central figure in a student's university experience. The areas of responsibility in this table are indicative of the role of the PAT at the University of Northampton and should be considered alongside the [PAT Policy](#). The PAT System is directly aligned with [Chapter B4 of the QAA Quality Code: Enabling student development and achievement](#) in meeting the expectation that:

Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. (QAA, 2013, p. 5)

No	Area	Chapter B4 Indicators	Responsibility
1	Pastoral care	2, 4, 5	PATs are often the first point of contact for students who need additional support for personal issues. PATs take an active role in referring students to appropriate support services within the Institution. ³ The need for pastoral care and specific intervention is often realised through systematic interactions with the tutees (i.e. scheduled PAT tutorials) and through informal rapport-building activities (i.e. 'checking in'). Through the University's Cause for Concern procedure, PATs can elicit support for the student from across the University.
2	Academic progress	5, 6, 8	PATs provide additional support, beyond the module tutor and programme leader, towards facilitating students' academic progress. These activities may include: helping students develop their study skills, helping students understand feedback on assessed work and helping students create action plans for improving their academic performance. ⁴ In some cases, PATs refer their tutees to the University's Academic Advice Managers, for specific regulatory and policy-based support around academic progress.
3	Employability and personal development	4, 6	PATs are often in a position to provide advice to tutees about their career development and other activities (e.g. critical thinking) to enhance their employability. This requires an awareness of the support and opportunities offered to students by the University's Centre for Employability and Engagement and by the student's own academic programme. Helping students to engage in personal development planning can nurture self-regulation and can establish a set of action points for discussion in future PAT sessions.
4	Quality assurance and quality enhancement	1, 2, 3, 7	As part of the quality assurance and quality enhancement of academic programmes, PATs provide input into their Programme's approach to enabling student development and achievement. In doing so, PATs provide insight to Programme Leaders to help them define, coordinate, monitor and evaluate roles for enabling student development and achievement. PATs are committed to equity but realise different students may require different support (and may engage in different ways). Development opportunities for PATs are provided through the University's staff development framework: C@N-DO. ⁵

¹ The PAT role is performed as part of a normal academic contract and is not a separate post.

² See: Wheeler, S. and Birtle, J. (1995) *A Handbook for Personal Tutors*. Buckingham: SRHE/Open University Press.

³ See www.northamptoniit.com/pat for a directory of support services for students and PATs.

⁴ See www.northamptoniit.com/pat for resources.

⁵ See [C@N-DO Events](#).

Personal Academic Tutoring and Student Success

The University of Northampton's approach to student success is supported by the following institutional principles⁶. The Personal Academic Tutoring system is a key mechanism for putting these principles into practice.

Student Success Principle 1:

Drawing on the definition of 'student success' provided by OFFA and HEFCE (2014) and the definitions for 'retention' and 'success' provided by the HEA (2014), the University's definition of Student Success is:

Ensuring the full and equitable participation in and progression through the University of Northampton higher education experience for all students, so they are more likely to complete their courses, fulfil their personal, academic and professional potential and go on to progress within their chosen career or postgraduate study.

Student Success Principle 2:

Student success, at the University of Northampton, is supported through a whole lifecycle approach, recognising that the student experience involves multiple, and sometimes iterative, stages.

Student Success Principle 3:

Student success, at the University of Northampton, involves an integrative, collaborative approach from within and beyond the Institution: recognising the value of working together to support students' progression through their student experience (see OFFA and HEFCE, 2014).

Student Success Principle 4:

Student success, at the University of Northampton, is supported through evidence-based practice: using data, best practice and scholarship to drive action planning, interventions, innovations and reflection on practice (see OFFA and HEFCE, 2014).

Student Success Principle 5:

In line with the QAA Quality Code Chapter B4, The University of Northampton has in place arrangements and resources which enable student success.

⁶ Institutional Principles for Student Success, Approved by the University's Student Experience Committee, 25 February 2015.

Personal Academic Tutoring and the First Year Experience

The PAT role is central to supporting students during the first year of their University experience. In operationalising the Institutional Principles for Student Success from page 3 as well as the University's First Year Experience project plan⁷, it is vital for PATs to take a 'proactive' approach to personal tutoring, particularly when supporting first year students (Laycock, 2009, p. 23).



FIGURE 1: THE PROACTIVE PAT

Opportunities to develop as a proactive PAT are available through the University's HEA-accredited staff development framework, C@N-DO. Activities shown in Figure 1 are supported by the University's First Year Experience Project, which launched in June 2015.

⁷ www.northamptonnilt.com/fye

Personal Academic Tutoring Case Studies

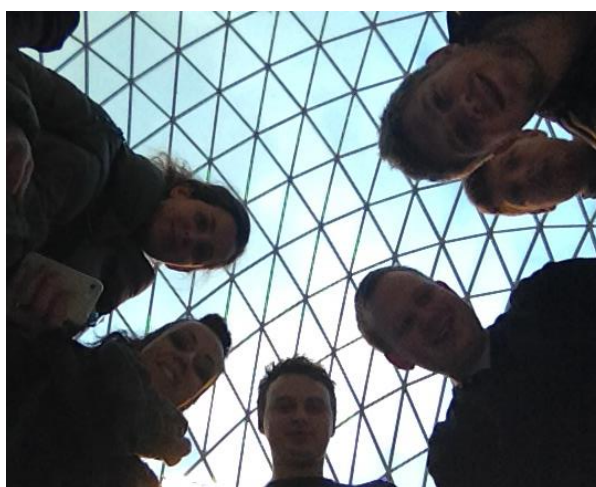
These short case studies were the output of a 2014/2015 project that aimed to understand the different ways that Personal Academic Tutoring operated across the University. From these examples, it is possible to extract several guiding principles for Personal Academic Tutoring that can be used to enhance our policy and practice for student advising. These guiding principles are presented in the next section.

Case Study 1

Architectural Technology, School of the Arts

James Engel, Subject Leader

This is an honours degree programme with approximately 20 students enrolled in each year of study, or 60 in total. There are three PATs on this programme, each of whom is a full-time member of academic staff teaching on this programme. Each PAT support a particular year-group (i.e. 20 tutees per PAT). This works on an annual rotation, meaning that the PATs will support the same student throughout their experience at the University of Northampton. For example, the PAT who supports first year students this year will support second-year students next year.



Architectural Technology students at the British Museum

Students are informed about Personal Academic Tutoring before the beginning of each Academic Year through their NILE sites (the University's Virtual Learning Environment). During Welcome Week, students have an introductory group tutorial and two individual tutorials each term. Tutorials are not compulsory for students to attend but given the practical and up-close nature of the coursework (e.g. studio work), many students and PATs are able to discuss issues as they arise, informally.

To support students in conceptualising their student experience as more than just class-time, the programme team prepare a timetable to show scheduled classes alongside other activities, such as studio time. In the final year of the programme, the PAT for that year-group collects data from students, which James Engel, the Subject Leader, remarked, 'adds fantastic information for our rolling action plans'.

Any problems that cannot be addressed by the PAT are often escalated to the Academic Advice Manager for the School.

My point of call is Chris Glenson, the Academic Advice Manager, for 'super concerns', beyond standard concerns, and she works to create a link between the PAT, the student and other sources of support. (James Engel, Subject Leader)

Case Study 2

Initial Teacher Training, School of Education

Elaine Batchelor, Subject Leader

The Initial Teacher Training (ITT) area includes four programmes: BA in Primary Education, BA Early Years Education, PGCE (Primary Education) and PGCE (Early Years Education). There are approximately 45 PATs working across these programmes to support approximately 480 students, giving a tutee-to-PAT ratio of 11. Year Leaders take a coordinating role to support PAT allocation and timetabling of PAT sessions.

PAT sessions take place according to milestones within the student journey. PAT sessions are scheduled at the beginning of each year of the programme, before and after their student teaching experience, and during the National Qualified Teacher training. PAT sessions are individual tutorials that are scheduled and shown as part of the student's timetable. These timetabled PAT sessions are compulsory but all PATs also operate an 'open door policy' that provides students with the opportunity for more informal advice sessions. The PAT sets and monitors targets with each student to support their professional, academic and personal learning.

During students' work placement modules, students will have visits from their PAT, who acts as a Moderation Tutor. In this way, the PAT provides a link with our partnership schools and supports the quality assurance of these programmes. Overall, the PATs on this programme feel their role is clear and their approach is systematic. The students appreciate the open access to PATs and if any PAT is not on campus, other tutors provide support.

Case Study 3

Health and Social Care (Foundation Degree)

Monica Catelinet, Senior Lecturer

The Foundation Degree Health and Social Care is a two-year programme with approximately 84 students (including 24 NHS students). PATs are allocated to students at the beginning of each year and, if possible, the same PAT works with the same tutees throughout the programme. There are five members of staff who work as PATs, giving a tutee-to-PAT ratio of 17.

At the beginning of each year, students sign a contract that outlines expectations of and by the student and that includes their commitment to engage in with Personal Academic Tutoring. Three compulsory PAT sessions are scheduled throughout the year as part of each student's timetable. These are individual sessions that focus on personal issues, feedback on academic assessments, upcoming coursework and career topics. Students are also able to access their PATs through an 'open-door policy' and all PATs work together to ensure there is a member of staff available for these sessions.

Key points arising from the compulsory sessions are recorded on a carbon-copy form, with one copy going to the student and one copy kept by the School. (These forms are printed by the University's Reprographics Department.) This year, the programme team has worked with the University's Centre for Employability and Engagement to integrate employability themes into the Personal Academic Tutoring sessions. Also, PATs are involved during the work placements in carrying out visits and in providing additional feedback on assessments. This gives the PAT an active role in supporting academic progress and social integration during this placement period when the students are mostly off-campus. Broadly speaking, the staff on this programme feel highly engaged

with the PAT role and are clear about their responsibilities as a PAT. Their approach to Personal Academic Tutoring means an increased workload for PAT during the students' first year (i.e. their work placement year) but this is manageable because the students are not on campus during much of this time.

Case Study 4

Criminology, School of Social Sciences

Manos Daskalou, Senior Lecturer

The BA Criminology is a three-year undergraduate degree programme with approximately 128 students (plus another 60 students who study this subject jointly). There are four staff members who work as PATs, giving a tutee-to-PAT ratio of at least 32. Personal Academic Tutoring happens as individual face-to-face sessions that are timetabled throughout the year. The first session takes place during Welcome Week and there are two or three additional sessions at various points in the year.



Criminology students on an engaged learning experience

The programme team also operates an 'open-door policy', which allows student to access PATs as and when needed. This is often challenging because of the open-plan work area. However, an advantage is that students can generally find support from within the team, even if their own PAT isn't readily available to talk. If a student's issues are at some level that cannot be supported by the PAT then we deal with the issue collectively as a team (primarily to signpost the student to the appropriate services).

Feedback collected by the programme team indicates that students are quite satisfied by the Personal Academic Tutoring provision. Indeed, the programme team reported that the one-to-one relationship-building between the PAT and their tutees is very effective. This is a central mechanism to support engagement and achievement but there is often a lack of time and physical break-out space to talk privately.

Case Study 5

Early Years Studies, School of Education

Dr Eunice Lumsden, Subject Leader

The Early Years subject area offers a range of programmes including a three-year Early Childhood Studies Degree (ECS) programme and a Foundation Degree in Early Years (two-year) programme. Approximately 207 students are enrolled in the ECS programme and 66 students are enrolled in the Foundation programme. There are approximately 12 members of staff who provide Personal Academic Tutoring for the degree programme and 5 members of staff who provide Personal Academic Tutoring for the Foundation degree. Several associate lecturers support these programmes as well. This equates to a tutee-to-PAT ratio of 21 and 13, respectively.

In the ECS degree programme, Personal Academic Tutoring is offered as a set of themed sessions, which take place as a series of group and individual tutorials. The typical pattern includes two individual tutorials per term and monthly group tutorials. Students

are also provided scheduled opportunities (drop-in sessions) to meet with their Year Tutor.

During the Personal Academic Tutoring sessions, tutees and PATs use a Personal Learning Plan as a tool for monitoring the tutee's development towards their own objectives. At the end of each year, the PAT facilitates an assessed piece of work called a 'personal learning dialogue' with their tutee to reflect on their development over the past year.

In the Foundation programme, students are supported by their PATs in the University setting and in their workplace. Like the students in the ECS programme, Foundation students have scheduled opportunities to meet with their Year Tutor and their PATs.

Holistically, Personal Academic Tutoring works to integrate the personal, professional and academic contexts of the learning experience. This works well for these programmes because there is a consistent and well-communicated approach to Personal Academic Tutoring. The Programme Leader steers this process and monitors its effectiveness.

Alongside the PAT role, the role of the Year Tutor supports the student experience. Also, these programmes have benefited from a peer mentoring scheme, where students in Years 2 and 3 provide support for students in the year below.

Case Study 6

Policing, School of Social Sciences

Angela Packwood, Subject Leader and Bob Lyman, Programme Leader

The Policing programme includes a Foundation degree and a BA (Honours) Degree, with approximately 135 students across all three years of undergraduate study. Approximately seven members of staff perform the PAT role, which equates to a tutee-to-PAT ratio of 19, approximately.

Personal Academic Tutoring is done as scheduled Group Debrief sessions, with at least one scheduled individual session per term. Additionally, all staff operate an 'open-door policy', which allows students to gain access to staff quickly and as needed. Tutees are assigned to PATs by the Module Leaders in Years 1 and 2 of both programmes. In Year 3 of the Degree programme, the PAT is the same person as the Dissertation Supervisor.

Students on these programmes report a high rate of satisfaction and this is partly due to the friendliness and accessibility of staff.

Case Study 7

Wildlife Conversation, School of Science and Technology

Dr Nigel Freestone, Head of Environmental Science and Duncan McCollin, Programme Leader

This is a small programme with approximately 14 students over three years and one member of staff working as a PAT. Much of the marketing, recruitment and course delivery is done by Moulton College, one of the University's partners.

Personal Academic Tutoring is provided as a group session in Welcome Week (one group session per year). Each student is offered at least one individual tutorial with the PAT in the Autumn term. Although there is not much engagement with the invited PAT sessions, the small size of the programme means that staff and students work closely with one another and easily build up a positive rapport. This support the good level of progression

between Years 1 and is reflected in the high rates of satisfaction reported in the National Student Survey.

It is important for all staff on this programme to respond quickly and personally to student queries and issues. A new initiative will include the implementation of at least three group tutorials in the Autumn term for Year 1 students. The aim of these group sessions will be to develop a sense of belonging and identity as a University of Northampton student on this programme.

Case Study 8

Student Support Project, School of Health

Ros Wray and Ellen Sharp

Grant funding from the East Midlands Strategic Health provided financial support to implement a student support project for Year 1 of the Pre-registration Nursing Programme. The objectives of the project included:

- Improving the identification of vulnerable students and also improving effectiveness in signposting them for support/advice.
- Developing evidence based Personal Academic Tutor strategies focusing initially on the support of first year pre-registration nurses.
- Consolidating the work we have commenced on risk assessment and reasonable adjustments for students in practice

The project offered students a 'support thread' which began at the point of pre-enrolment and was woven throughout the first year curriculum. The role of support did not replace or supersede the role of the Personal Academic Tutor, rather it ran in parallel for students who required some form of additional support, be it pastoral or academic. There was a designated day for weekly face-to-face contact with students. The project was carried out in close collaboration with colleagues from both academic and student administration teams with an overall aim of working towards joined-up systems. In this way, the project worked at an operational and strategic level.

A key finding of the project was the discovery that students returning to study after a break are especially vulnerable to withdraw in Year 1. To address this, a tracker and letter system was created that provides the returning student with key information, which is then followed up with a face-to-face meeting to ensure that all support mechanisms are in place. Information from the students can assist in acquiring an understanding of factors and themes that may contribute to attrition which can inform retention strategies.

Through this project, it has been possible to identify pressure points in the curriculum where some students seem to struggle, and this has enabled the project team to embed strategies to promote resilience and persistence to Year 2. This is an ongoing strategy for the School and will be evaluated each year.

Future objectives for the project team focus on moving beyond Year 1 to support transitions into Years 2 and 3. The team would like to explore what is in place to support high-achieving students, with a view to further enhancing these arrangements. Findings and lessons learned from this project will be disseminated across the School and University.

Guiding Principles for Personal Academic Tutoring at the University of Northampton

The eight case studies presented in the previous section provide insight into the different approaches to Personal Academic Tutoring across the University. As noted by several of the participating programme teams, Personal Academic Tutoring is a balancing act. On one hand it is vital to respond quickly to students' needs as they arise. On the other hand, it is important to work proactively in scaffolding the whole student experience. From the PAT Pilot Study (2014-2015) the following principles, or 'lessons learned' serve as guidelines for effectively managing this 'balancing act'.

1. Clear and frequent communication to students about Personal Academic Tutoring, during all stages of the student experience (including pre-study) reinforces the importance of Personal Academic Tutoring in achieving their academic, personal and professional goals.
2. A scheduled group tutorial during Welcome Week of each academic year is an effective way to reinforce Personal Academic Tutoring as a central feature of students' learning experience and helps to nurture social belonging.
3. Regular, scheduled group Personal Academic Tutorials are effective ways to address broader topics related to study skills, employability, social belonging and sources of support, and these sessions may be a more efficient way for staff to meet with students.
4. Regular, scheduled individual Personal Academic Tutorials are effective ways to address personal concerns, academic progress and personal development.
5. Having an 'open-door policy' for students to access their PAT (or another member of staff who can help) is important for students to feel supported, and has a measurable impact on student satisfaction.
6. Providing a means of communicating and agreeing expectations at the beginning of each academic year, may enhance levels of student engagement with Personal Academic Tutoring.
7. Personal Academic Tutoring sessions are excellent opportunities to engage students in the wider discourse around retention, progression and student success.
8. Targeted interventions by PATs are a significant source of support for students who may be 'at-risk' and contribute to higher rates of retention and progression within the programme.
9. PATs are often the first point of call for support and need to feel equipped to signpost students to appropriate sources of specialised support.
10. PATs are able to escalate issues to the Academic Advice Managers within each School for additional support.
11. PATs can play an extended and valuable role in work based learning, through placement visits and additional feedback on assessed work.
12. PATs are an additional source of informal, formative feedback on students' assessed work and provide support for developing students' metacognitive abilities to use feedback to improve learning and performance.
13. Personal Academic Tutoring can be enhanced through collaboration with other areas of the University, such as the University's Centre for Employability and Engagement, the University International Office and Centre for Achievement and Performance.

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