

## PETERHOUSE CAMBRIDGE



## THE TUTORIAL SYSTEM

This document describes the Tutorial system in Peterhouse and some of the expectations and responsibilities of all participants, namely undergraduates, Tutors and teachers. The Tutorial system works at its best when all parties co-operate in a spirit of mutual respect and of shared responsibilities.

The Senior Tutor is ultimately responsible for operation of the system. Those involved are the College's Tutors, its Directors of Studies, its Supervisors and its undergraduates. The Senior Tutor has his own Tutorial pupils, for whom he is directly responsible, but any undergraduate of the College may consult the Senior Tutor. The Senior Tutor will also deal with any issues or concerns that any undergraduates do not feel able to put to their own Tutor or Director of Studies.

### The Tutor

The Tutors have general oversight of all aspects of the life of undergraduates in their charge from admission to the College until graduation. Indeed for so long as they are Fellows of the College they may be expected to have residual obligations to their pupils. They are responsible for their well-being, academic, social and financial. The Tutors mediate between the College and the undergraduates and between the University and the undergraduates. Through the Senior Tutor they advise the College's Governing Body on Tutorial business. Each Tutor is allocated a number of undergraduates in a range of Triposes; and for these pupils that Tutor is specifically responsible. Tutors are regularly in discussion with the Senior Tutor, the other Tutors and the Directors of Studies so as to ensure a common Tutorial policy, practice and mutual support. Each Tutor does, however, maintain confidentiality about individual pupils.

Undergraduates may expect the following from a Tutor:

- (i) a supportive and constructive adviser on academic, financial and social concerns;
- (ii) a first guide in the case of serious personal problems or concerns (for example: stress, fear of failure, loneliness, eating disorders, bereavement, relationship breakdowns);
- (iii) an intermediary between the undergraduate and the University authorities, and also the University bodies whose concern is for undergraduate welfare, e.g. the University Counselling Service, and with medical advisers;
- (iv) a broker, where appropriate and within the bounds of confidentiality, between undergraduates and others concerned with their well-being (for example family, sponsoring bodies) and also the Student Loans Company;
- (v) a mediator of sensitive comment from and on the undergraduate and from and on those responsible for teaching and for progress generally, including the Director of Studies;
- (vi) a consultant on changing Tripos, withdrawing, gaining exceptional permission to go out of residence ('degrading'), the conduct of examinations (including applications to sit

examinations in College or with extra time), complaints and appeals, and any matter in this area relating to disability (including dyslexia) or illness;

(vii) a referee for applications for funding, for further education and for employment even beyond graduation.

The Tutors provide comprehensive support and guidance to the individuals in their care: it is not, for this reason, feasible here to provide an exhaustive list of their responsibilities.

Each weekday in term-time the Tutors each have regular Tutorial Hours: undergraduates are encouraged to visit them in person with their Tutorial business during those hours. In an emergency a Tutor may be contacted through the duty Porter.

All Tutors may be contacted by post via the Porters or by e-mail through the College web site, but most things are, initially at least, best dealt with by a personal visit. It is reasonable to expect a Tutor to reply to a letter or e-mail within seven days.

Undergraduates are assigned to their own Tutor, but they may, if they feel that it would be helpful, raise an issue or concern with another of the Tutors. There are currently two men and two women Tutors. Undergraduates should also note that guidance on some, usually other than academic, matters may be sought from the Dean.

Undergraduates are expected to:

- (i) communicate as appropriate with their Tutor, and at a minimum ensure that they see their Tutor as required at the end of each Full Term at appointments made by the Tutor;
- (ii) visit their Tutor if summoned: Tutors do not summon undergraduates unless there is a substantial reason;
- (iii) check their pigeonholes in the Porter's Lodge and their e-mail regularly (at least every two days) for messages from Tutors and those who provide administrative assistance to the Tutors, namely the Tutors' Secretary and the staff of the Tutorial Office;
- (iv) inform their Tutor as soon as practicable of any academic, financial or social concerns or difficulties. In some, but by no means all, cases these may also have been raised with a Director of Studies;
- (v) ensure that their requests are reasonable. Tutors will always act swiftly in an emergency; but in other instances it is sensible and just that they be given reasonable notice of requests. For example, if a Tutor is asked to write a reference it is reasonable to make that request well in advance of a deadline;
- (vi) remember that the relationship with a Tutor is one based on honesty and mutual respect: it is dependent on co-operation and trust.

### **Directors of Studies**

Directors of Studies are responsible for advising and directing undergraduates on their academic work. They are responsible for engaging supervisors on behalf of the College and for exercising a general oversight of teaching and learning in their Tripos subject and for giving general advice on it. They communicate with the Senior Tutor and Tutors, as appropriate, about the progress of undergraduates, in particular about any difficulties that affect an undergraduate's academic performance.

Undergraduates may expect Directors of Studies to provide the following:

- (i) advice on the planning and progress of their academic work and, where necessary, regular review of that work. Practice varies in this: some Directors of Studies have regular weekly hours in Term when they may be consulted; but all may be contacted by post via the Porters or by e-mail through the College web site. It is reasonable to expect a reply to any e-mail within seven days.
- (ii) up-to-date and accurate advice and guidance on courses and papers, including making undergraduates aware of any Faculty or Departmental handbooks or similar, guidelines or web-sites, checking their examination entries, informing of and interpreting examination marks, organising College examinations where appropriate, advising on possible graduate courses and assessing any undergraduate who is considering asking to change into their Tripos;
- (iii) a meeting with their Director of Studies at the beginning of Full Term, where appropriate, in order to discuss the impending Term's work and to arrange supervisions and at other times to be advised on their progress;
- (iv) an individual consultation with their Director of Studies normally at the end of each Full Term in order to review the Term's work in the light of supervision reports and advice on work to be undertaken during the forthcoming vacation;
- (v) an appropriate response to information from undergraduates about the quality of supervision provided to them by each supervisor;
- (vi) recommendations to the College's Ward Librarian on purchases for their subject;
- (vii) references on behalf of undergraduates.

Undergraduates are expected to:

- (i) communicate as appropriate with their Director of Studies and keep agreed appointments: if they miss such a meeting without a reason that is found acceptable by their Tutor they may expect to be fined by their Tutor;
- (ii) check their pigeon-holes and e-mail at least every two days for messages from their Director of Studies or the staff of the Tutorial Office and to respond to such messages promptly;
- (iii) inform their Director of Studies as soon as practicable of any academic concerns or difficulties. In some, but by no means all, cases these may also have been raised with a Tutor;
- (iv) notify the Director of Studies as soon as practicable of concerns about a supervisor, a course of supervisions, or the arrangement of supervisions. These concerns may also be raised with a Tutor, but for practical issues the Director of Studies is best placed to take action;
- (v) keep up to date with relevant information about their course provided by the College or the University through handbooks or similar, course-guides or on a web-site;
- (vi) suggest acquisitions for the College Library by filling in the *Book Request Form* in the Ward Library or through the Ward Library web site;
- (vii) ensure that their requests are reasonable: it is sensible and just that Directors of Studies be given reasonable notice of requests. For example, if a Director of Studies is asked to write a reference it is reasonable to make that request well in advance of a deadline;
- (viii) remember that the relationship with a Director of Studies is a mutual one: it is the undergraduates' responsibility to ensure that they organise their time and commitments so as to give clear priority to their academic work and that they have made every effort to complete to the best of their ability the work, essays, problems, projects, as agreed and advised by their Director of Studies.

## Supervisors

The supervisor is engaged for the College by a Director of Studies in order to offer for a course or paper appropriate specialised teaching to complement that offered by the University.

Supervisions are the fundamental educational provision of the colleges in Cambridge: they offer a medium through which undergraduates learn to work independently, to learn with and from others, to present, defend and concede arguments, to handle problems, to question their own assumptions, and to meet deadlines.

Undergraduates may expect the following from supervisors:

- (i) a full hour of supervision unless agreed otherwise by the Director of Studies;
- (ii) a reasonably sized group for supervisions in which they have the opportunity to participate fully;
- (iii) guidance about how best to prepare for supervisions, examinations and assessed work;
- (iv) assignment of reasonable amounts of work, neither excessive nor minimal, and to receive constructive comment on them;
- (v) marking and assessment of their work with advice for improvement;
- (vi) content that is relevant to the course and helps understanding of the subject with constructive comment and discussion of their questions and problems;
- (vii) respect for their opinions;
- (viii) opportunity to discuss in privacy and in confidence any problems they perceive in the quality, relevance, or dynamics of the supervisions that they are receiving.

Undergraduates themselves are expected to:

- (i) complete the work set to the very best of their ability;
- (ii) deliver work on time after ensuring that they have agreed a deadline with the supervisor;
- (iii) present themselves punctually for every supervision;
- (iv) contribute actively to the supervision and make their opinions known;
- (v) contact the supervisor in plenty of time if they are unable to be present for the supervision or to complete the work set;
- (vi) be charged and fined by their Tutor if they miss a supervision without a reason that is found acceptable by their Tutor, who will consult their Director of Studies;
- (vii) remember that the relationship with a supervisor is a mutual one: it is the undergraduates' responsibility to ensure that they organise their time and commitments to give clear priority to academic work and that they have made every reasonable effort to complete to the best of their ability the work or project as agreed and advised by their supervisor.

The strength of the Tutorial system in the College lies in its interlinked structure whereby a range of constructive possibilities exist for dealing with any difficulties that may arise. Thus a query about a course or paper is often best addressed in the first instance to a supervisor; discussion of broader questions of academic progress are normally best raised in the first instance with the Director of Studies; other matters of concern, some of them not directly academic, are usually best discussed with the Tutor. Sometimes, however, a different approach suggests itself and the Tutorial system has flexibility.

The College adheres to the descriptions of the rôles and functions of Tutors, Directors of Studies and Supervisors set out on the Senior Tutors Committee web site:

<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/committee/seniortutors/guidance/tutor.html>

<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/committee/seniortutors/guidance/dos.html>

<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/committee/seniortutors/guidance/supervisor.html>

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