

BEING AN EFFECTIVE PERSONAL ACADEMIC TUTOR

AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE

Medicine



Written by the University Senior Tutor Steering Group, September 2017 and adapted for the FOM.
Updated 2025

INTRODUCTION

Being a Personal Academic Tutor is an expected and important part of the role of academics and clinicians and one that has great potential in enthusing, guiding and helping transform the lives of our students. It is essential students feel well supported as they develop and face the challenges of the BM programmes; they really value the opportunity to develop a relationship with a Personal Academic Tutor who gets to know them over time.

Quite apart from its central role in supporting the student experience, it is also critical in helping prepare medical students for their future careers. For the University it is also important in terms of NSS scores, determining positions on league tables and funding: the provision of quality academic student support is central to the University's strategic vision. The GMC's Good Medical Practice states that "all doctors should contribute to teaching and training doctors and students". All Personal Academic Tutors, whatever their background, have a vital role as mentors and role models for tomorrow's doctors.

The system of Personal Academic Tutors (PATs) and Senior Tutors (STs) has long been in place in the Medical Faculty and a similar model has now been adopted by the whole University in order to ensure consistency and quality of student academic and pastoral support.

This essential guide outlines what you need to know and do to fulfil your role as a PAT. It reminds you of the formal University policy regarding the role of the PAT, what is expected of you, and how you can help your tutee develop through encouraging Realism, Responsibility and Resilience. It also contains information about wider University support, available training and who to contact if you have any queries. There is a lot more information available online which can be accessed through the BM Staff Handbook:

<https://sway.cloud.microsoft/jV5LmOJq92RiT6na?ref=Link>.

If you do not have a University log in you can register for Federated Access using a different email via the link in the handbook. Once registered you will be able to access extra information via Blackboard (the virtual learning environment), MEDUSA (online staff development) and the University password protected pages.

CONTENTS

03

1. Roles and Responsibilities of PATs



05

2. Student Personal Performance and Development Review (PPDR)



06

3. Faculty Support for PATs



07

4. Wider University Support for students and useful links



08

5. Student information



09

6. Faculty/University policies and procedures

1. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PERSONAL ACADEMIC TUTORS AND SENIOR TUTORS

Students find the PAT system of great value and benefit and it can undoubtedly enhance their overall student experience and professional and personal development as future doctors. PATs advise and support students throughout their programme and are often the first point of contact for pastoral and academic issues. PATs are not, however, expected to develop specialist skills in responding to personal issues which impact on academic progress and performance but should be confident in signposting to specialist support and/or the appropriate Senior Tutor.

The most important aspect of your role is to show your tutees that you care about their individual academic, professional and personal journey.

To support the role of the PAT the Faculty has developed an online training module that can be accessed in MEDUSA (Medical Education Staff Access), a collection

of online resources designed for staff teaching Southampton medical students.

Another important resource for students is the Information in the Faculty Hub and Undergraduate handbook on Blackboard (our Virtual Learning Environment). Please encourage students to look at it. If you do not have a University account we can arrange access for you with Federated Access via the BM Staff Handbook:

<https://sway.cloud.microsoft/jV5LmOJq92RiT6na?ref=Link>

Blackboard is a student facing resource contains all the information and links a student might need. It should be the first place students go to for forms, policies and information.

Role of the Personal Academic Tutor

1.1 The PAT will:

- Develop and maintain a safe and confidential relationship with their tutees
- Provide advice and support to tutees in matters related to academic work and students' progress
- Where this also involves being the first point of contact for pastoral issues, signpost tutees to the Senior Tutor and/or other appropriate support and work with tutees to find appropriate pathways to resolve difficulties
- Maintain effective communication with other support services on behalf of tutees

1.2 The expectations of the PAT are that they will:

- Maintain regular contact with each tutee
- Give appropriate support to each tutee
- Follow up with tutees who are not making satisfactory progress
- Liaise with other members of academic and administrative staff, as appropriate, in particular the Senior Tutor of the AU/Faculty
- Be aware of other sources of support in the University, accessed through the PAT website
- Provide support regarding academic progress, assessment and examinations
- Normally write references for tutees on request as appropriate [with reference to central guidance on this], support tutees in their personal development, where appropriate
- Conduct an annual Personal Performance and Development Review (PPDR) for each tutee. This will involve looking at their portfolio, discussing their reflections and progress and helping them write a personal development plan
- Contact the Student Office if there are any changes to your availability to tutees e.g maternity leave



In view of the Data Protection Act please be aware that you should not disclose details about your tutees to anyone outside the University, including their parents, without the student's permission. If you are worried about your tutee please talk to one of the senior tutors as if a student is at risk the Faculty can make a decision to break confidentiality in the best interests of the student.

Each PAT is assigned tutees at the start of the academic year. It is anticipated that these tutees will remain with the same tutor for the duration of their programme, thus resulting in each tutor having a mix of tutees from different years. The tasks expected for each year are outlined below.

Year 0 and Year 1

When a new student is allocated to you, they will be sent an email with your details and asked to make an appointment with you (see below). If you do not hear from your tutee, please contact them or the Student Office. Before they arrive new medical students are asked to undertake a brief (300 word) pre-arrival task where they explore an aspect of professionalism that they find interesting or challenging. Students are asked to share this with their PATs so that it can be discussed in the first meeting (if deemed suitable). Most pre-arrival tasks make for fascinating reading! The aim is that this will help facilitate conversation and build the foundations of an ongoing relationship. It is good practice to keep a written note of every meeting with your tutee especially if there are any concerns. A student's first year is a particularly important time and for that reason the Faculty has defined the minimum contact that PATs should have with their students as follows:

| | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| In first 3 Weeks | Personal meeting (if possible) | Get to know each other, discuss expectations, opportunities and challenges |
| End of first Semester | Personal or Virtual meeting | Check progress and wellbeing |
| Second semester | Personal meeting (if possible) | PPDR and Personal Development Plan (PDP) |

Year 2, 3 and 4

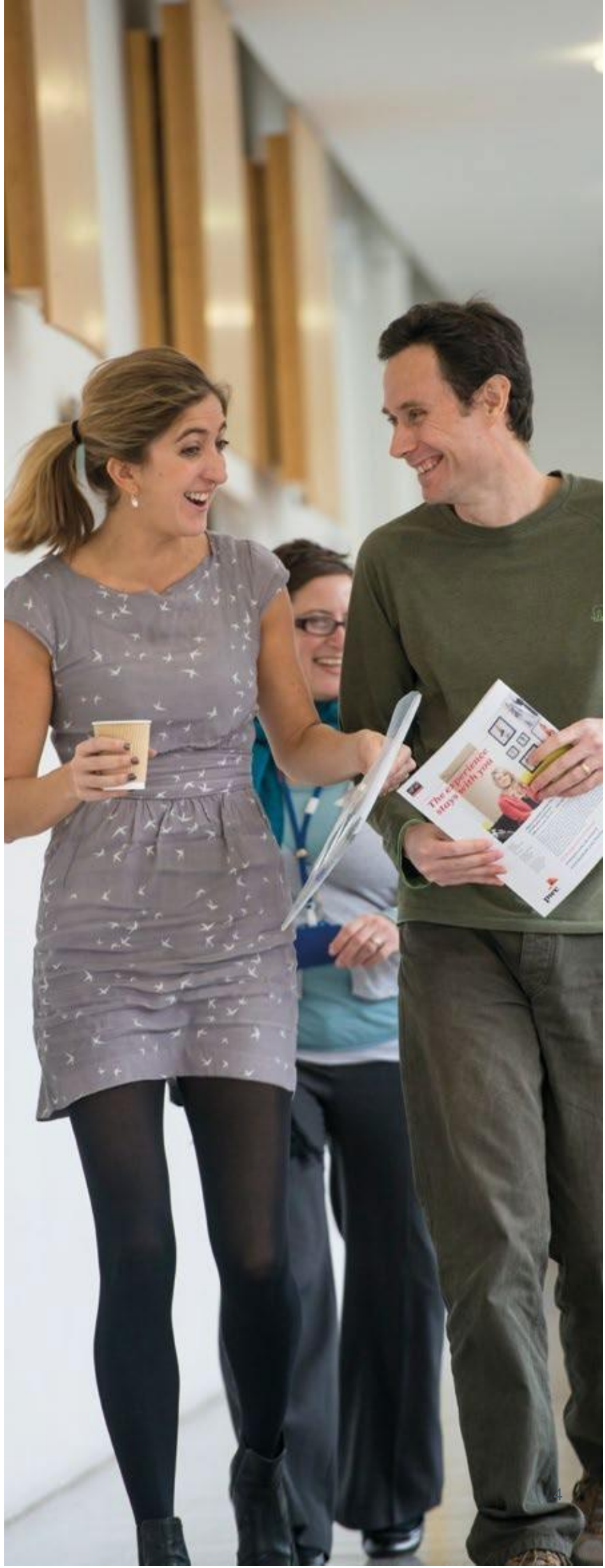
At the beginning of each academic year PATs should make contact with tutees by email, Teams, or telephone and wherever possible arrange a personal meeting. Students on placement may prefer a virtual meeting, so please try and be flexible to their specific needs. The amount of contact you have throughout the year will depend on your time and each student's individual situation. Your tutees must book a meeting with you for their PPDR, which should be undertaken in February to April of that academic year. Please leave some slots in your diary for this well in advance.

Students who wish to intercalate between years 3 and 4 are required to discuss this with their PAT who is also required to sign off the student's Intercalation Request Form (an e-signature is acceptable).

Students can choose to intercalate in Southampton for MMedSc, MRes or MSc study or externally to obtain a BSc or MSc in their chosen area of interest.

Final Year

Students in final year are encouraged to meet their PAT as part of their personal and professional development but a formal PPDR is not compulsory. It is a good opportunity to reflect on their time as a student and look forward to their foundation posts and their career aspirations. You may also be asked to complete a reference for the foundation programme.



2. STUDENT PERSONAL PERFORMANCE AND DEVELOPMENT REVIEW (PPDR)

The Faculty of Medicine requires all students (except final year) to participate in an annual PPDR which enables the Faculty to demonstrate that students have met some of the learning outcomes specified by the General Medical Council (GMC) in Outcomes for Graduates (2018). The PPDR process helps prepare students for the ongoing appraisal system in which all doctors must participate throughout their career.

The PPDR should normally be completed by the end of April.

All students will be using an electronic portfolio. PATs will need to access this using their registered login. If you have any problems with accessing this, please contact the Student Office at fmed-studentoffice@soton.ac.uk

The PPDR is confidential between each student and their PAT. The students' responsibility to provide the paperwork and ensure that the Personal Development Plan (PDP) is uploaded and signed off.

Before the PPDR

Students should access the PPDR form and complete the first section. Students in the later years should also review the previous year's PDP. These documents should be sent / made available on the portfolio to the PAT in advance of the PPDR meeting (at a minimum brought to the meeting by the tutee).

During each year the student is also required to have entered into their portfolio some evidence statutory and mandatory training and critical reflective work.

The PPDR meeting

During the PPDR there is an opportunity to discuss things that have gone well and things that have not gone so well, including how this relates to any feedback the student has received and what actions they may have taken as a result.

The PPDR meeting should be focused on personal development and helping each student to achieve their full potential. It should cover formal and informal assessments, personal experiences with staff, clinicians, and students and anonymised patient experiences.

It is a two-way process between the student and his/her tutor. This is not an assessment but an opportunity for each student to plan their learning strategy for the future and identify areas where help might be needed.

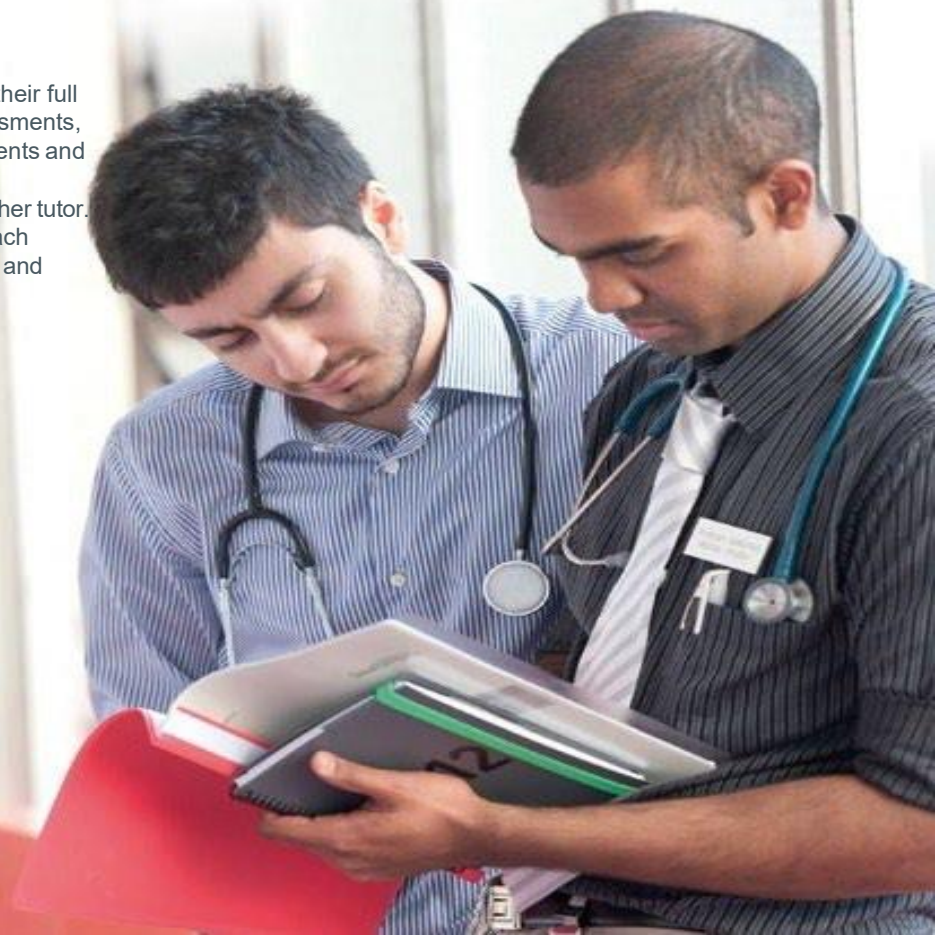
The Personal Development Plan (PDP)

At the end of the PPDR, students are asked to generate a simple PDP, similar to those required of all practising doctors, outlining their learning needs and how to address these. There is no stipulated number of goals and it is more important that thought goes into the quality and meaningfulness of the entries than in the number. The tutor should sign this off at the meeting electronically or afterwards via an email which the portfolio will generate and send when the PDP is uploaded. The signed PDP is evidence the PPDR has taken place.

Throughout the following year we hope the student will revisit this plan and this should be discussed at the next PPDR.

Practicalities

- Students need to allow sufficient time for their PPDR meeting to take place and must give their PAT sufficient notice.
- If there are repeated difficulties in communication between tutee and tutor, please inform the Student Office fmed-studentoffice@soton.ac.uk
- If students do not have a PPDR for two consecutive years we treat this as an example of poor professional behaviour and may issue students with a Notice of Concern letter. This must be declared when completing their 'Transfer of Information' form in Final Year which is then passed to their Foundation School.
- If any serious concerns are raised during the meeting the tutor may ask permission to discuss these with a Senior Tutor or another member of the Faculty.



3. FACULTY SUPPORT FOR PATS



In addition to the Personal Academic Tutorial Scheme, the Faculty of Medicine also has a team of Senior Tutors who are available to meet students and provide additional support. If you need advice about a specific student case or feel that a complex issue needs further expertise, please contact the Student Office or the relevant Senior Tutor who will be happy to advise. The Senior Tutor team is highly experienced and can give individual support to students with more serious issues.

Email: FmedST@soton.ac.uk

Academic concerns about students should be discussed with the Programme or Year Leads (please contact Student Office).

Other concerns (including health, professionalism, and behaviour) should be discussed with the Senior Tutors who can bring them to Student Progress Committee. If you have any concerns about a tutee, however small, please contact the Faculty. Low level concerns from many sources may shed light on the bigger picture.

A short video explaining the Faculty process for addressing concerns about students can be accessed through the Undergraduate Handbook on Blackboard (go.soton.ac.uk/90u). It can be found in the section 'Your Responsibilities' blackboard.soton.ac.uk/webapps/blackboard/content/listContent.jsp?course_id=_152405_1&content_id=_2476608_1&mode=reset

4. WIDER UNIVERSITY SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AND USEFUL LINKS

The University offers a multitude of student services. These are clearly outlined in detail in the Online Handbook for PATs or via the student services website.

www.southampton.ac.uk/student-services/index.page

<https://soton.ac.sharepoint.com/teams/PersonalAcademicTutoringHub/SitePages/Home.aspx>

It is important that PATs familiarise themselves with these support services so they can feel confident in signposting students to appropriate support directly.



Student Hub

There will now be one point of contact for all teams via The Student Hub. Staff are being asked to complete a form for any referral - the Raising Concerns Form. Support will be face to face and live chat as well as phone and email. Staff will be able to support students with all queries, including support, accommodation, fees etc. The Centre will be locked at night but staff will be there to let students access the building if they have requested to be seen out of hours. There is a taxi fund available which is managed by the Centre so if a student needs to be seen urgently, they can be brought to Building 37.

Email: studenthub@soton.ac.uk
Telephone: +44(0)23 8059 9599 (available 24/7)
Live chat: available 24/7
Drop In: The Student Services Centre is open from 09:00 to 17:00, Monday to Friday

Disability and Inclusion Team

This team will support students with disabilities/Additional Exam requirements/DSA/mentoring etc. We also have a student health senior tutor within Faculty who can advise and support students.

Email: studenthub@soton.ac.uk
Student Health Senior Tutor: Dr Sian Brett
Email: S.Brett@soton.ac.uk

Library and Academic Skills

Study support is available weekdays 10.00-12.00 and 14.00-16.00 in the Academic Skills Hub in the Hartley Library. These are drop-in individual sessions. There is no need to book. Throughout the academic year Library staff will be running training sessions on study skills including finding books and journals, referencing and academic writing. All are advertised on the web with online booking. The Library staff are available to offer help and general support at other times either face-to-face or on Live Chat. Online, the academic skills website has a range of academic skills support material. There is also an academic skills collection at the Health Services Library at University Hospital Southampton and staff are also available to support students at this location.

Website: library.soton.ac.uk/home
Telephone: 023 8059 5848
Email: libenqs@soton.ac.uk

SUSU – The Students' Union Advice Centre

Building 40, Highfield campus Mon-Fri 9.00-5.00. A confidential, independent and free advice service to students on any student issue.

Website: www.susu.org/help-and-support/advice-centre/2015/
Telephone: 023 8059 2085
Email: advice@susu.org

Report and Support

Students can report any acts of discrimination, bullying or harassment anonymously or to get support.

Website: <https://reportandsupport.southampton.ac.uk/>

5. STUDENT INFORMATION

In the induction period new students are told who their PAT is and how to contact them. New students are also informed about the role of the PAT and STs during an induction session led by a Senior Tutor.

The information students are given about making the most of their relationship with their PAT can be found at:

www.southampton.ac.uk/studentadmin/academic-support-guidance/personal-tutor.page

The University considers PATs to have an important role in developing realism, responsibility and resilience at University. The following summary (written for students) highlights the main themes and could provide useful guidance on what you can expect of your tutees.

REALISM

→ Be realistic about the challenges of moving into this phase of your life and that these are perfectly normal and to be expected whether you are at University or elsewhere. It is not a perfect world and you will hit snags and have to work hard academically and personally and so will need to build up your own personal resilience and set realistic expectations and targets.

→ You should be open to ask for help or support from your Personal Academic Tutor as soon as possible, and be prepared to take their advice if they suggest how and where you can access more specialist support, academic or pastoral. Don't bottle things up.



RESPONSIBILITY

→ Make the most of all contact and guidance opportunities and attend all contact hours in order to facilitate your academic progression and the development of subject specific, personal and transferable skills. Reflect on and make the most of all of the various forms of feedback, both formal and informal.

→ Understand the expectations and nature of your relationship with your Personal Academic Tutor. Use your Personal Academic Tutor as your first point of contact for anything to do with your academic work such as your marks, exams and feedback, career progression, writing references. For anything administrative approach your Student Office.

→ Contact your Personal academic tutor every semester and attend meetings without the need to for them to chase or remind you. You should prepare for your meetings with your Personal Academic Tutor by considering responses to questions and areas for reflection if distributed previously.

→ Check your University emails regularly (twice a day) and make sure that you only use your University email address to communicate with your Personal Academic Tutor, lecturers or Student Office. Keep your inbox relatively tidy; don't let it get full. This is the primary means for the University to contact you.



RESILIENCE

→ Choose and try to apply strategies to ensure your own well-being and ability to engage in your academic studies, and the wider University community. Be realistic that you may not always enjoy all the work and that it will be challenging at times. If you have moved away from home make sure you register with a local GP and explore the wide range of support available at University.

→ If you feel unable to share more personal or non-academic issues with your PAT then remember that you can contact the relevant Senior Tutor for support and guidance. Also, your PAT may approach the Senior Tutor for advice in confidence, or refer you to them directly. University is not just about your degree, but about growing in personal confidence, maturity and resilience; make the most of all such opportunities.



6. KEY FACULTY/UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES AND POLICIES

Special Considerations

https://www.southampton.ac.uk/quality/assessment/special_considerations.page

Students experiencing difficulties which could affect their performance are encouraged to apply for special considerations. This does not only apply to examinations but also to placements and assessed written submissions. Information and forms are available at the web address but the key points are:

- This process is for unforeseen events or exceptional circumstances outside the student's control and impacting directly on a student's performance in a particular assessment(s). It is not appropriate to use a request for special considerations as means to bring a specific circumstance to the Faculty's attention other than in cases where a specific assessment/placement is being directly affected.
- It is not designed to support students with long-term health conditions. Students should refer to The Student Hub for support and reasonable adjustments for long term conditions.
- If students are not already getting support, they should be referred to The Student Hub. Personal Academic Tutors can make referrals on behalf of a student. (Telephone: 023 80599 599).
- If there is a flare-up/downturn in a long term condition close to an assessment this can be considered but supporting documentary evidence will be required.
- In all circumstances *contemporaneous* documentary evidence is required. Students can self-certificate for non-attendance through sickness for up to five days.
- The time frame is important. The application should be submitted normally not more than five working days after any assessment or deadline.
- Special Considerations requests which are incomplete or do not enclose evidence in support of that request will not be considered by the Special Considerations Board.
- The form, together with the evidence, should be submitted to The Student Hub.
- Students are advised to keep copies of all documentation they submit.

Taking a Pause from studies

Students may request to take a pause in their studies for health or personal reasons. They need to complete a form:

https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=-XhTSvQpPk2-iWadA62p2PYShjFAnLJMmQN_JSaiKhUMUtJV09FNE1UVEI2OE1LVjBHT0xBU1A1SyQIQCN0PWcu&route=shorturl and it will be considered by the Student Progress Committee. It is recommended that students considering taking a pause in studies discuss this with a ST or PAT.

Attendance and absence

All the information is available in the Undergraduate Handbook on Blackboard (Attendance and Absence section). Please note the Faculty has a policy that any student absent for more than four consecutive weeks will be unable to make up the time missed and will therefore may need to suspend. The student will need to return to repeat the year.

Report and Support

<https://reportandsupport.southampton.ac.uk/>

Acts of harassment, discrimination or hate are never ok. You can report something anonymously or report something and get support from an advisor.

Fitness to Practise

www.southampton.ac.uk/quality/off_campus_learningfitness_to_practise.page

www.southampton.ac.uk/medicine/undergraduate/apply/fitness_to_practise.page

A student's Fitness to Practise may be challenged when their behaviour, health and/or professional conduct gives cause for concern.

Appeals and complaints

www.southampton.ac.uk/studentadmin/appeals-complaints-for-students.page

- Students wishing to appeal against an academic decision should use the Regulations Governing Academic Appeals by Students.
- A complaint is defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction which requires a response'. The University aims to resolve the majority of complaints and concerns quickly and informally. It is essential that students refer to the full Complaint Regulations and links can be found on the page above.

Student Discipline

Any student whose behaviour does not meet expected standards can be dealt with through this process. There is also a mediation service to help resolve disputes between students which do not need to go down the more formal investigation of the misconduct process. Students, staff or members of the public can contact the student misconduct team for advice.

www.southampton.ac.uk/studentadmin/discipline/student-information.page





Find out more:

www.southampton.ac.uk/medicine