

## Suggested topics for meetings

### 1. *Registration/first teaching week group meeting with first years*

The first year students may already have had a brief presentation on plagiarism and academic malpractice as part of their induction schedule. Having done some form of getting-to-know-you, academic advisors can start the session by addressing the transition to higher education, and move on to the other, related issues as suitable. You should also explain that the role of the academic advisor extends to general academic affairs only, and discuss any implications of this. This will be a session with fairly small group, so your usual techniques for getting the most out of tutorial discussion (such as working in pairs) will be useful here.

#### Transition to Higher Education

- "How are you settling down?"
- "What expectations do you have of life as a student here?"
- "What expectations do you think people will have of you?"
- "What kinds of questions do you have in your mind as you look at the year ahead?"
- "What do you think the challenges will be in your first year?"
- "Are you prepared to be an independent learner?"
- "What are you most looking forward to, and most apprehensive of?"
- "Have you thought about the differences between learning at university and in your prior education?", and so on.

#### Plagiarism/malpractice

- "Are you familiar with the idea of plagiarism? Can you explain what it is?"
- "Why is it seen as important in universities?"
- "What are ways of avoiding plagiarism?" and/or "What are the good habits to get into?"
- "What are other forms of academic malpractice?" (these are mentioned in the Guidance on Plagiarism in most undergraduate handbooks)

#### How instruction is given in universities

- This can include how lectures and tutorials/seminars work in conjunction
- How office hours can be used as an additional resource for contact with academics
- How to get the most out of these forms of instruction (for example, by being active in tutorials, taking notes efficiently, following up questions out of class).

### 2. *Individual follow-up meetings (first/second week of semester)*

By the time of the first individual meeting, all students should have had some experience of lectures, tutorials, and possibly been set some work (or undertaken some studying of their own volition). They may come with questions motivated by any of these. It is worth asking about the student's initial experience of instruction even if they do not volunteer it. Likewise, the topics from the group meeting can be followed up in the light of their early experience of instruction and degree-level work.

Discussion could also be focused on elements of motivation, study skills, and personal development. There is plenty of scope for referral if students have subsequent problems with specific study skills, but early on students may simply find it motivating to talk with an academic member of staff about approaches to note-taking, library skills, academic expectations and so on. In terms of personal development, academic advisors could encourage students to reflect on their

learning, their longer term goals and aspirations, and how they intend to track or record their progress in achieving them. It might be particularly interesting to compare notes from this meeting with those taken in the student's subsequent years.

### 3. *Individual meeting in fifth week of second semester*

The purpose of the third meeting is to ascertain the student's progress after receiving all first semester exam marks and feedback for first semester course work. Please see p. 16 for some questions that might come up after examinations, and for some additional ideas for conducting an examination review.

#### *(i) Exam marks*

Students will almost certainly have something to say about the exam marks they have received. This gives the academic advisor the opportunity to ask:

- Where the student thinks that s/he has performed well/badly
- The reasons for that performance
- What the student needs to focus on subsequently; what can be improved
- What the student is doing particularly well or badly in assessment
- What plans need to be made on the basis of this exam performance.

NB:- work cannot be re-marked, nor academic judgement questioned.

#### *(ii) Feedback*

Discussions on this topic could:

- Discuss the feedback that advisees have received on their work
- Provide clarity and advice on how to improve their work for the next assessment
- Give advice on how to use the feedback that has been provided.

More generally, the discussion could address:

- The purpose of feedback (i.e. as allowing students to reflect both on their specific performance and generic skills)
- What grades mean in the light of marking conventions
- Other methods of receiving and obtaining feedback, e.g. through office hours
- What students should do if they wish to pursue a specific matter that has been brought up in their feedback (students should see the course convenor in the first instance, and then the undergraduate director of studies for that discipline if necessary).

Overseas students whose performance is being affected by language competence should be encouraged to visit the University Language Centre, which offers a variety of in-session courses and support services.

### 4. *Second and third year meetings; induction for returning students*

Assuming that returning students have met regularly with their academic advisor, the personal relationship should be such that themes and issues particular to each student suggest themselves. Moreover, second and third year students will have more results, feedback, and experience to form the basis of discussion. It may be a useful point of departure for the academic advisor to think of early-year meetings as *induction for returning students*. This connotes the successful completion of

an academic year as an important milestone, and allows the discussion to include: the student's plan or strategy for the coming year; revisiting any of the topics above; personal development, e.g. student's development of new skills or experience of new forms of assessment.

For finalists, an important part of the discussion might concern what follows the degree, e.g. post-graduate study or employment. Although these matters do not assume expert knowledge on the part of the academic advisor – and citing useful contacts such as the Careers Service and/or post-graduate office will be necessary – mentioning these matters at the beginning of the year may serve as a valuable prompt for finalists. There is also no reason that they could not also be brought up with second year students. *So, although expert careers advice is not expected of academic advisors, the role is nonetheless useful in its potential to prompt and motivate students to think about careers.*

In short, discussions with returning students should be both retrospective and prospective, using the student's experiences to date as a means of reflection, and using this reflection as a way of adapting future actions both for the remainder of their undergraduate degree and beyond.

<http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2015/feb/16/disengaged-and-overwhelmed-why-do-second-year-students-underperform>

Please also see the case study on "My exam results are lower than I expected" above for ideas on how to approach an examination result review for all students.

