

The role of Personal Tutors in supporting student wellbeing

Helen Groenendaal, Head of Wellbeing department

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Wellbeing Department

The professional services department responsible for advising and supporting students with managing all aspects of their health and wellbeing.

The HoD is **Helen Groenendaal** who also acts as Student Conduct Officer, Prevent Lead and Designated Safeguarding Lead.

As a department we:

- **Assist** with transition to and adjustment to university life.
- **Empower** students & enable them to successfully continue their studies.
- **Support** students to embrace opportunities & make the most of their time at Royal Holloway.
- **Encourage** students to seek help and advice when needed - before the issue becomes overwhelming.

Supporting students at Royal Holloway



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Head

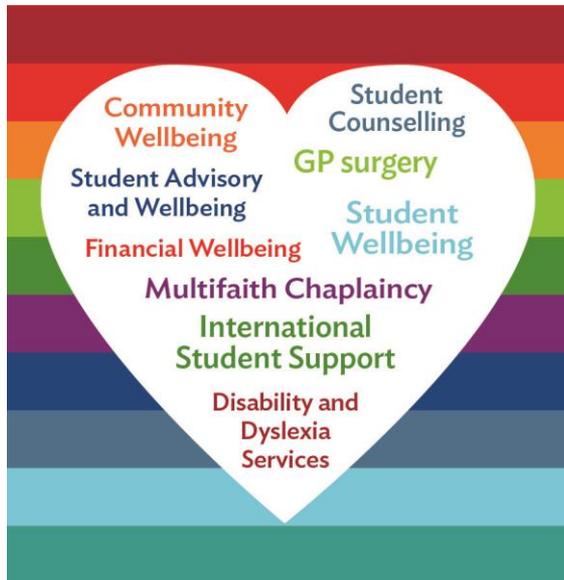
Helen Groenendaal

Senior team

Denise Keable
Julie Wright
Pat Simpson
Vacancy

Team includes

Wellbeing Advisers
Disability Advisers
Mental Health Advisers
Mental Health Practitioners
Counsellors
Financial Advisers
Academic Advisers
International Advisers
Chaplains....and more!





Wellbeing: Supporting you at Royal Holloway

Community

Supporting you....with living in the local community

Conduct

Supporting you....with your conduct

Counselling

Supporting you....through counselling

Disability & Neurodiversity

Supporting you....with your disability

Financial Advice

Supporting you....with your finances

International Advice

Supporting you....as an international student

Mental Health

Supporting you....with your mental health

Multifaith Chaplaincy

Supporting you....with your faith & spirituality

Support & Guidance

Supporting you....with wellbeing guidance

To support a whole institution response to supporting student mental health and wellbeing we encourage you all to follow our **SMART Wellbeing** guidance

S

Signpost

M

Make

A

Assessment

R

Refer

T

To

Wellbeing





What are the key wellbeing issues facing students?

Current issues for students



Quest for perfectionism

The 'worried well'

Untested social boundaries

Complexity of personal
circumstances

Anxiety – academic, social

Impact of Covid, isolation and
lack of social engagement

Financial pressure

Emerging MH at a time of
transition



What are current sector & societal issues related to student mental health & wellbeing?

Current sector & societal issues



Bridging the gap between RH
and NHS / specialist services

'Helicopter' parenting / in loco
parentis

Growing demand & need for
specialism

Complexity: DV, SV, gender,
personality disorders, eating
disorders

Heightened expectations on
universities

Risk in an online world

Increased regulation: OfS / OIA

Suicide prevention focus

The role of a PT to support wellbeing



Being aware of the mental health & wellbeing of tutees is key to the role of a PT.

Personal Tutors will normally be required to undertake the following activities:

- Maintaining regular contact with tutees, in person and by e-mail;
- Providing basic pastoral support to tutees;
- Supporting tutees in personal, academic and career development planning, and signposting specialist staff who can provide guidance;
- Following up on tutees who are not making satisfactory progress or who have poor attendance records;
- Liaising with other members of academic staff involved in the teaching of tutees;
- Liaising with members of the Disability & Neurodiversity network about provision for students with special needs, including disabilities, SpLD, or ongoing personal issues which impact on studying;
- Maintaining awareness of other sources of support within College;
- Writing references for current and former tutees

Source: Personal Tutors Guide 2021

The role of a PT to support wellbeing



You are not expected to resolve every query a student has nor to necessarily know the answer to what the student requires or would benefit from immediately.

The most important aspect of a PT role is to be:

- Available.
- Approachable.
- Supportive.

Help your tutees be happy, healthy and engaged with their whole student experience.

Know your own limits & boundaries and stay alert to your own wellbeing.

The role of a PT to support wellbeing



We recommend you:

1. Keep in contact.
2. Monitor engagement / attendance.
3. Are alert to concerns at all times.
4. Understand the support available.
5. Support and enable accessibility and reasonable adjustments.
6. Maintain professional boundaries.
7. Follow up.



The five ways to wellbeing are a good base to student interactions:

www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/five-ways-to-wellbeing/and have the added bonus of being good for you too.

The role of a PT to support wellbeing



Keep in contact

We want students to have the confidence to discuss with their Personal Tutor any requirements or problems that they might have and establishing supportive, regular contact is key.

Tips:

- Early contact is crucial to this to establish that relationship as a key element of transition to university - a welcome email will help them feel part of a supportive community and comfortable they have made the right choice of university.
- Ensure they know the best way to contact and when there are in-person opportunities - for those who prefer or will benefit from this.
- Be persistent in making contact with any student that fails to engage with you as their PT. If they are missing touch points don't assume that everything is fine.



Monitor engagement / attendance

Poor or patchy engagement can be a sign of poor wellbeing or may be an outcome of a difficult personal circumstance(s). Never assume that everything is okay and that a student is freely choosing not to engage academically.

Tips

- Support the School Office and Student Administration in identifying concerns and trying to establish contact with the student.
- In your contact with the student ask about any barriers which may be limiting or impeding their attendance e.g. Are they struggling with travel costs? Do they have caring responsibilities? Are they socially anxious?
- Act promptly when you notice an issue - it is better to raise the alert and check things out than leave a problem to escalate.



Are alert to concerns at all times

Being able to recognise when things are difficult for a student is complex and so as an institution we all need to work together to fit the pieces of the jigsaw to get a full picture and understanding of the students' needs.

Tips:

- In your PT notes keep an overview of the student's presentation when they meet / email you so you can be aware of any changes in their appearance, personality or engagement.
- If you are concerned find a quiet / discreet moment to ask them – "I've noticed you seem distracted. How are you and can I help?" Ask if they have talked to anyone else to judge the next step.
- If you're not sure ask a colleague who also knows the students for their thoughts.



Understand the support available

There is a broad spectrum of support available to students across the Schools and Professional Services and we have access to a good network of external specialist services where needed.

Tips:

- Follow the *SMART Wellbeing* approach (& join a training session!).
- Use the (soon to be launched) intranet and Moodle information pages.
- Ask for advice from the teams if you're unsure - no one is expected to be an expert on every aspect of the student experience and support needs.
- Be reassured that no piece of information about a student is unhelpful – it all helps us in achieving a holistic and full awareness of a student.



Support and enable accessibility and reasonable adjustments

Our Disability & Neurodiversity team (formerly D&DS) are here to support all students who have disclosed a disability, long standing medical condition, specific learning difficulty or mental health condition.

Tips:

- Know who the Disability Network member in your Department is & understand how the student's support agreement needs.
- Talk through the agreement with the student and work to identify any areas which may need addressed - for example exam access arrangements which need to be agreed and organised at the earliest opportunity.
- Follow the guidance, don't overpromise as adjustments must be agreed with the relevant teams, need to be fair and uphold our academic standards and processes.



Maintain professional boundaries

The relationship with a tutee should be friendly and professional and you should maintain practical and emotional boundaries. You are not *in loco parentis*, not a friend, not expected to resolve all concerns, and should not be accessible 24/7.

Tips

- Don't promise confidentiality.
- Don't share your mobile number – email or Teams calls are best to keep boundaries.
- Keep to set hours and refer to emergency support out of hours support where needed.
- Focus your support on how this will help their academic progress.
- Remember your own wellbeing in managing this relationship and workload.



Follow up

Prompt referral or signposting is key but it also important to remember that you are a key contact for your tutee and so they should feel that they can return to speak with you again to discuss how things are going or to raise other concerns / questions.

Tips:

- Put a place marker in for catch up to check in.
- Ask the student to take ownership and keep you updated as needed.
- Ask them to give permission for Wellbeing (or other support services) to share with you on a 'need to know' basis.



Help & support student page

<https://intranet.royalholloway.ac.uk/students/help-support/help-and-support.aspx>

Staff contact list

<https://intranet.royalholloway.ac.uk/students/help-support/student-advisory-wellbeing/staff-directory/staff-directory.aspx>

Emergency support

<https://intranet.royalholloway.ac.uk/students/help-support/get-help-with-an-emergency/get-help-with-an-emergency-or-contact-security.aspx>

Disability support overview

<https://intranet.royalholloway.ac.uk/students/help-support/disabilities-and-dyslexia/how-we-can-support-you.aspx>

Questions / Comments



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Please do ask any questions or share your comments.

Feel free to contact me outside of this session:
helen.groenendaal@royalholloway.ac.uk

Encourage students to share their feedback to
support continuous development of our services:
<https://forms.office.com/r/VcKesGDcUH>

