Academic Advising: a guide for academic staff

This leaflet introduces advisers to the Academic Advising System at UEA, providing an outline of key advising responsibilities plus further information and resources.

The Academic Advising System
UEA operates an Advising System for all of its undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, including part time and visiting students. The key features of the system are outlined below.

- All undergraduate and taught postgraduate students will be allocated an Academic Adviser who will be a member of their School teaching staff.
- Each School will have a Senior Adviser and larger Schools are strongly recommended to appoint a Deputy Senior Adviser, of opposite gender where appropriate.
- A minimum of three individual meetings between a student and his/her Adviser will be offered per academic year at appropriate times.
- An Adviser may choose to meet Advisees in small groups but should not discuss personal matters pertaining to individual students in such meetings.
- Each Adviser will allocate a minimum of two advising hours per week during the academic year, when they will be available to see Advisees.
- Advisers will be available to give advice to their Advisees themselves, or refer appropriately to others, on all academic related matters.
- An Adviser, on request, will provide references for Advisees.
- The University will support Schools in the Advisee evaluation of their advising sessions towards the end of the Spring Semester each year.
- All new Advisers are required to attend CSED Adviser training in their first year of the role. All Advisers are advised to refresh their training every five years.

What does an Adviser do?
- Provides ongoing support to Advisees based on establishing and maintaining an appropriate relationship.
- Provides holistic (academic and personal) information, advice and guidance.
- Provides advice on module selection and enrolment.
- Monitors Advisee academic progress and professional behaviour where appropriate, maintaining records in student files.
- Refers Advisees to other specialist agencies, ensuring knowledge and information of referral points are up to date.
- Writes references for Advisees.

A good Adviser:
- listens;
- avoids making judgements;
- has a broad understanding of equality and diversity issues in the HE context;
- is available at defined times;
- is proactive when difficulties become apparent;
- is aware of appropriate professional boundaries, including confidentiality;
- is fully aware of relevant UEA regulations and sources of further advice and guidance.

What should I talk to my Advisees about?
As an Adviser you should be able to provide your Advisees with general information on most matters connected with student life and refer them to other points of contact / information where appropriate.

You may choose to arrange meetings to discuss timely academic matters, such as:
- module selection / enrolment;
- coursework feedback;
- academic progress;
- personal & skills development;
- career development.

An Advisee may also choose to talk to you about:
- intercalation;
- academic appeals;
- coursework extensions;
- changing Adviser;
- generic study / course concerns;
- personal concerns;
- health / wellbeing.
Meeting your Advisees for the first time
When UG and PGT students arrive at UEA, part of their induction and settling in period will include meeting with their Adviser for the first time. To help set expectations for future meetings it is important that you structure the first meeting, ensuring there is equal time for explanations about the Advisory System, your role as their Adviser as well as time for general discussion about their new experiences, expectations and anxieties.

Try to:
- explain the overall purpose of the Advising System and the support that you can offer for their overall academic and personal development;
- express your expectations of Advisees to attend meetings when invited, explaining the importance of the Adviser/Advisee relationship e.g. for references;
- provide contact details and information on your set advising hours and / or how to sign up for appointments or arrange alternative meetings;
- clarify confidentiality boundaries;
- make a brief note of your meeting for the student’s file.

Ask questions (from: Wheeler and Birtle, 1993)
- Tell me something about yourself.
- How do you feel about being here?
- How does the university differ from your school?
- What do you expect from your experience here?
- What kind of extra-curricular activities do you hope to become involved with?
- Is there anything that you are anxious about with respect to being a student?
- What personal resources do you have that might help you to settle in here and enjoy yourself?
- Have you thought about what kind of career you would like to follow?

You may choose to meet your Advisees in small groups, particularly when Advisees have not responded to the offer of an individual meeting. Group meetings can help students feel less anxious about meeting their Adviser, especially for the first time.

Confidentiality
If your Advisee chooses to consult you about any personal matters, these should be kept confidential between you and your Advisee, unless you agree to further action. For information about confidentiality refer to ‘Responding to students in difficulty: a guide for advisers and other UEA staff’ or consult the UEA’s Confidentiality Policy, both available on the Student Services website: www.uea.ac.uk/students

Writing references
Your Advisee can ask you to act as their referee. Employers may ask you to confirm / comment on their personal details, academic abilities, skills and competencies, personality and extra curricular activities. Writing references is assisted by establishing an appropriate advisory relationship with your Advisee, together with good record keeping. For a guide to writing references see: www.lse.ac.uk/collections/careersService/aboutUs/References.pdf

Who are my Advisees?
To find out who your Advisees are you can look them up on The Portal (academic tab) using E:vision to search the Student Information System.

Suppose I do not get on with an Advisee?
If in exceptional circumstances you cannot continue to support an Advisee in your role as their Adviser you are advised to discuss the issues with your Senior Adviser and you may request a transfer of Advisee. Additionally, if you encounter irreconcilable differences with an Advisee you can approach the Dean of Students’ Office for impartial and confidential advice.

Further information and resources
The Dean of Students’ Office offers advice to any member of staff concerned about a student. For further information contact the Dean of Students’ Office x2761; email dos@uea.ac.uk
The Centre for Staff and Educational Development (CSED) organises Adviser training in collaboration with the Dean of Students’ Office. For further information contact CSED on x3039 or consult their web pages at www.uea.ac.uk/csed
UEA resources for students and staff. Further advising resources can be found on the Student Services website www.uea.ac.uk/students

References