

The role of Director of Studies

Introduction

Direction of studies is one of the distinctive aspects of Cambridge undergraduate education, combining important educational and organisational elements. Directors of Studies contribute to promoting fair access to studying at Cambridge and serve as educational role models and academic mentors to students during their studies. They contribute to maintaining and improving the quality of education within the Collegiate University, including helping to achieve equitable outcomes for all students.

All students

Directors of Studies' understanding of course organisation and assessment means they are able to provide structure, help students navigate their studies and develop a more integrated understanding of their course. Drawing on their understanding of Tripos and paper learning outcomes, Directors of Studies are able to guide students in

- managing expectations about workload and progressively developing their capabilities for directing their own learning in ways which are appropriate to the subject, to the level of study and to students' needs
- developing reflective attitudes to their own learning and to encouraging academic development

Practices vary according to discipline and student numbers and may include some of the following:

- creating opportunities for collaborative learning, peer support and cohort building and encouraging interactions between undergraduates and postgraduates
- organising inclusive subject-level or cognate-subject level provision such as workshops, reading groups, writing groups
- developmental formative assessment exercise to identify personalised priorities for development and build confidence in undertaking assessment

As a baseline, Directors of Studies

- i. make themselves aware of and ensure compliance with any specific academic requirements in Student Support Documents (SSDs)
- ii. read supervision feedback submitted by supervisors using CamCORS, releasing them to students, and update / approve CamSIS entries
- iii. meet at least termly on an individual basis with students to reflect on progress and developmental priorities; this includes discussing supervisors' feedback and, when appropriate, assessment results
- iv. serve as a first point of contact for feedback from students about their course, their supervisions and other aspects of their educational experience, relaying this feedback as appropriate to supervisors, College(s) and / or Department(s)
- v. arrange supervisions or, where this is co-ordinated through the Department, ensure that arrangements are in place
- vi. check and approve exam entries using CamSIS

- vii. make themselves available to meet and advise students on subject-related matters, particularly if the student is experiencing academic difficulties
- viii. where students are experiencing difficulties, liaise with pastoral tutors and / or wellbeing teams, as appropriate
- ix. make themselves available to meet any student who is considering a change of subject and maintain up-to-date awareness, within reason, of options available in related Triposes and regulations governing progression from year to year
- x. where a course change is agreed, complete and distribute the Change of Course form
- xi. liaise with College and Departmental Librarians, as appropriate, to ensure that publications and learning materials are kept up to date
- xii. liaise with the Senior Tutor, monitoring students' educational progress and outcomes, reflecting on changing needs in the context of wider University-, Department- and College-level provision
- xiii. participate in Faculty or Departmental meetings of Directors of Studies, drawing on student feedback and their knowledge of students' experiences to inform planning, delivery and redevelopment of courses and in order to maintain their own knowledge of Tripos assessment and course organisation, so that they can guide students appropriately
- xiv. where possible, give advice on possible future career pathways
- xv. write references as reasonably requested by students
- xvi. make recommendations on scholarships and prizes

First-year students

Students' academic experiences during their first year of study provide strong foundations for their academic progress, outcomes and personal wellbeing. Recognising that opportunities and practices will vary according to discipline and student numbers, helping students to develop a strong sense of academic identity and to feel that they belong to a learning community is likely also to encourage students to seek out and engage with support when they encounter the challenges which are part of the experience of studying and developing in higher education.

Practices vary according to discipline and student numbers and may include some of the following:

- organising or contributing to inclusive subject-level or cognate-subject level provision which addresses important aspects of academic and personal development, such as supervision as part of a learning process; academic reading, note-making and writing; preparing for assessments

As a baseline, Directors of Studies

- i. make themselves aware of Department- and College-level arrangements and communications for incoming first-year students
- ii. communicate with incoming first-year students after University places are concerned, providing introductory materials
- iii. meet with incoming first-year students at the start of the year to help students to understand how to navigate their studies, manage expectations about workload and to develop reflective approaches to university-level study

Supervisors

Supervision is at the heart of Cambridge undergraduate education. Practices rightly vary between subjects, but there are common aspects: supervision is an intensive, flexible, feedback-rich process which supports students' independent studies and their ability to engage in collaborative learning with peers and supervisors. Through supervision, working with supervisors and peers, undergraduates become familiar with and proficient in ways of thinking and practising in their disciplines; clarify and explore ideas and issues taught in lectures and classes; develop subject knowledge and skills that will be assessed summatively; organise their learning and, as they progress through their studies, develop as independent scholars.

Practices vary according to discipline and student numbers and may include some of the following:

- encouraging and / or signposting supervisors towards opportunities for continuing professional development
- informing and / or involving supervisors with relevant academic induction and development provision for students

As a baseline, Directors of Studies

- i. appoint supervisors or, where this is co-ordinated through the Department, ensure that arrangements are in place
- ii. ensure that new supervisors have participated in [approved introductory training](#)
- iii. brief supervisors to discuss with the Director of Studies the situation of any student who is experiencing difficulties as soon as these arise
- iv. encourage students to participate constructively in College- and / or Department-organised supervision feedback processes (such as termly surveys)
- v. make themselves aware of students' feedback on their experience of supervisions
- vi. provide positive as well as developmental feedback to supervisors, College(s) and / or Department(s), as appropriate

Admissions

The Collegiate University aims to admit a representative cross section of society within its student body, who can access the same opportunities and quality of experience and can expect the same outcomes in terms of completion, attainment and progression. Directors of Studies advise on the selection of applicants, contributing to fair access to study at Cambridge.

As a baseline, Directors of Studies

- i. contribute to Open Days and answering queries from potential applicants
- ii. interviewing applicants for admission
- iii. advise the Admissions Tutor on which applicants should receive offers and what conditions are to be set
- iv. advise the Admissions Tutor on which applicants are to be pooled or to be admitted from the Winter or Summer Pools
- v. participate in subject moderation procedures
- vi. provide information and orientation to offer holders

Data protection

Directors of Studies must make themselves familiar with the main requirements of their College's Data Protection Policy. The broad principles to be borne in mind are as follows: a student has the right to see any record held about them, from interview reports, to supervision reports and references. All such reports should therefore be written on the assumption that the student may see them. All students have the right to ask for personal information about them to be kept secure and confidential. If in any doubt, a Director of Studies should always request consent to disclose personal information about a student to another person. Directors of Studies also have a responsibility to 'third parties' who have provided information about a student, such as that contained in a reference, to seek their permission before disclosing that information to the student if the student has asked to see it.

Developing expertise and practice

The contribution of Directors of Studies to undergraduate education at Cambridge is recognised by the Collegiate University. Directors of Studies should feel encouraged to take pro-active steps to extend their own knowledge and practice for the benefit of their students' education and development and to contribute to the enhancement of undergraduate education.

Practices vary according to discipline and organisational context and may include some of the following:

- College and Department feedback mechanisms which encourage students to reflect on their experiences of the DoS system, including identifying supportive practice as well as negative experiences
- opportunities for professional development for all DoSs, for example sharing examples of practice, reviewing guidance on effectively supporting students with particular needs or affected by inequities
- development opportunities may be co-ordinated between colleges and / or via DoS committees, for example

As a baseline, Directors of Studies

- i. participate in introductory training related to the role of Directors of Studies organised by the Senior Tutors' Committee
- ii. participate in Faculty or Departmental meetings of Directors of Studies to inform planning, delivery and redevelopment of courses and in order to maintain their own knowledge of Tripos assessment and course organisation, so that they can guide students appropriately

Selected sources of information and support

Cambridge is a highly devolved collegiate University and so organisational structures and processes vary. There are, however, common pathways for information and questions, including

College- / Department-/Faculty-specific

- Departmental / Faculty Committee of Directors of Studies ('DoS Committee'): provides mutual support for DoSs within each subject, including gathering and communicating relevant course information, contributing to course improvements

- College Tutorial Office: for all aspects of teaching and welfare within a College, including creating and maintaining student records, dealing with matriculation, examinations, financial support and graduation
- Senior Tutor: responsible for all teaching and learning activities and welfare within a College

Cambridge-wide

- the Senior Tutors' Committee: [guidance and procedures](#), including introductory training for new DoSs and Tutors, College policies and procedures
- the [Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning](#) (CCTL): programmes and workshops to develop teaching practice, Cambridge-wide focus for knowledge exchange concerning undergraduate and postgraduate education
- [Personal and Professional Development](#) (PPD): training and development including leadership and management, personal effectiveness and productivity

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Approved by the Senior Tutors' Committee on 26 May 2023