

Introductory Guide to being a Tutor

Thank you for deciding to be a Tutor on the BPNA Distance Learning Course. The Tutor fulfils an important role as he/she provides continuing support for the trainee as they work their way through the course.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

The BPNA distance learning course in paediatric neurology is designed to complement clinical training through work-based learning. The course offers a comprehensive theoretical background in paediatric neurology with the aim of improving clinical practice. It covers the whole of paediatric neurology in a systematic planned way.

Paediatric neurology has been divided into 12 standalone units:

1	Introductory Unit
2	Neonatal Neurology
3	Development & Learning
4	Central Motor Deficits
5	Neuromuscular Disorders
6	Epilepsy & Paroxysmal Disorders
7	Cerebrovascular Disease, Trauma & Coma
8	Inflammation & Infection of the CNS
9	Metabolic, Nutrition & Systemic Disease
10	Vision and Hearing
11	Neuro-oncology
12	Psychological Development

Each Unit is about 48 working hours and takes about 3 months to complete, working on the course about 4-5 hours per week. The epilepsy unit is 100 hours and will take about 6 months to complete. The BPNA imposes no deadlines for completion – if it takes someone a year or more to complete Unit 6, that is fine by us.

The course has been designed and written by Consultant Paediatric Neurologists and other specialists who are actively involved in clinical care of children with neurological disorders. The course was originally designed for doctors in paediatric neurology specialist training, however many general paediatricians and trainees are now completing units relevant to their practice, eg, Unit 6 Epilepsy and Unit 2 Neonatal Neurology. The units have been designed to allow for differing levels of experience and background. We recommend that paediatric neurology trainees complete the whole course and general paediatricians enrol for units relevant to their role.

WHO CAN BE A TUTOR?

The answer is any Consultant Paediatric Neurologist who has an interest in encouraging younger colleagues.

We know from tutor and participant feedback that those who meet regularly with a tutor make the best progress. If you have more than one student, meet with them as a group. Our feedback shows that Tutor led groups make the very best progress. Peer support and pressure ensures everyone attends having completed the next part of the course and contributes to discussion and learning within the group.

WHAT AM I EXPECTED TO DO?

1. Meet with your student(s) about once a month for a couple of hours. If you have more than one student, you should all meet together as a group. The main aim is to provide support and maintain momentum through the course – have an expectation that they will have completed the agreed parts of the materials before you meet.

Some groups progress through the course together, all working on the same unit at the same time. There are benefits to this – everyone can agree what they will have completed by the time they next meet, shared experience of the same materials to discuss at the meeting etc. The difficulty comes when people work at different rates through the material. Our feedback shows that people enjoy being able to work at their own pace but still like to have support from being part of a group.

Other groups have students working on different units at the same time, but still meet as a group. There are benefits to this too. The ideal way to complete a unit is when they are working in that particular rotation, for example, working in Neonates and at the same time working on Unit 2 Neonatal Neurology. Allowing students to plan their own path through the units allows this. The whole group benefits from a diverse range of discussion topics in a supportive atmosphere.

2. Discuss the Unit they are working on and their progress – what are they enjoying, what have they found difficult. Discuss specific aspects of cases etc as they are required to do for certain activities in each Unit.
3. Facilitate your student completing each Unit. A 'Resource Listing' is available for each Unit. This lists all the resources that your student(s) will require access to in order to complete the Unit, such as:
 - text books
 - case notes
 - visits to clinics
4. Agree how much of the course they will have completed by the next time you meet.
5. When they complete a Unit, sign their appraisal form to confirm that they have completed it satisfactorily.

HOW MUCH TIME WILL THIS TAKE ME?

Feedback tells us that successful students benefit from monthly meetings of 1-2 hours. This allows students to talk about what they are enjoying about the course and where they are having difficulties and need specific help. It is time well spent. It can also usefully double up as an opportunity to talk about training issues and appraisal in general. Even the best run departments, because of day to day pressures, you may find scheduling this difficult. However, we would encourage you to fix a time for these meetings and to have the expectation that students will attend and will have completed the agreed amount of the material.

DO I NEED TO KNOW THE COURSE MATERIALS?

Tutors are not required to know the course materials. As a Tutor you will automatically be given access to the course website. This will give you access the course materials to review the content, look up topics etc. You will also be able to see your student's progress.

Many tutors report that they value having access to the course materials for their own use.

WILL I GAIN ANYTHING FROM IT?

Tutors report that they have learned a great deal from going through the course material with their student(s).

HOW DOES THE COURSE WORK?

Each Unit stands alone. Unit 1 provides an introduction to paediatric neurology, apart from that, the units do not need to be completed in any particular order.

Units have been divided into smaller Sections of about 4-8 hours work. Participants need to work through the sections in the order they appear as later sections will depend on learning gained in earlier sections. The first few sections tend to include basic science before progressing to clinically based material.

For each Section the participant will download from the website

- An activity book
- A commentary book
- All the papers required to complete the essential activities

Participants should work through the activity book and commentary book – do Activity 1, read Commentary 1, do Activity 2, read Commentary 2 etc.

Authors have identified the essential components to be included in order to achieve the aim and learning outcomes. You will find that every activity has a “star rating” which is intended to identify essential and optional activities.

- *** Indicates that the activity is considered essential
- ** This activity is highly recommended and will enhance understanding of the subject matter
- * Participants should read the activity decide for if they need to do it. Sometimes it will be a pre-test or supplementary information to check the appropriate level of background knowledge for more complicated parts of the section. It may be that the material is, again, valuable for your understanding of the topic, but that not doing it will not affect whether you

Now if you are happy to be a Tutor, put aside a small amount of time for reflection about how you are going to approach the task.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT TRAINEES WANT TO GET OUT OF THE COURSE

As Tutor and facilitator of their learning, it is important to understand what motivates your trainees and why they are undertaking this course. You may find that conceptually you have quite different ideas from them about why they are doing the course and what their aims actually are.

At the beginning of the course, trainees start with Unit 1, Section 1, Activity 1, which asks them to look at what they hope to get out of the course. We suggest that you take a look at it too...

Please note down on the left hand side of the boxes how you think the trainees would respond in terms of what they seek in terms of knowledge, skills and other aspects. Then, on the right hand side (perhaps in a different colour) write down things which, as an experienced paediatric neurologist, you think they might not have thought of.

Activity 1:

What do you want to get out of this BPNA course? What do you hope to develop by undertaking these Distance Learning units?

Knowledge

Skills

Other

Commentary:

The sorts of things trainees write have been pretty much as you would expect. They have identified clearly the importance of having structured knowledge and a framework on which to base their theoretical understanding. An aspect that often needs teasing out is how they apply these skills and knowledge in practice and how they actively go about getting feedback on how well they have done. An example would be that trainees often seek a clear idea on how to draw up an investigation plan in clinical circumstances for specific conditions. The course should allow them to do this, present it to you and then get feedback (often both the Tutor and trainee learns!).

It might be useful for you to discuss with your trainee when you meet how they filled in this activity (Activity 1, Section 1, Unit 1) as an introduction to talking through how they are going to approach the course and what they perceive your role to be.

Remember what you and your trainee have said to each other at this initial meeting. We encourage the trainees to keep reminding themselves at times particularly when they are feeling de-motivated to go back to this activity and think about what it was that they wanted to get out of the course.

Understanding individual learning styles

People learn in many different ways, some of which stem from how they have learnt or been taught in the past. You will find that very often this is a type of learning that can be referred to as 'hurdle jumping' ie you are learning to pass an assessment or test and then you rapidly forget much that you had learnt! Clearly for the longer term, professional learning - otherwise known as lifelong learning - is very much how professionals keep up to date as effective clinicians. One of the purposes underpinning this distance learning course is to help trainees to look at their everyday working environment and consider how they can turn this into a learning environment ie how to become effective lifelong learners and thus effective practitioners.

It is useful, we find, for trainees to look at their learning styles. There are many books and much educational research (and quite a lot of controversial papers) written about learning styles. This is not an exact science but we have found it valuable to get trainees to reflect on learning styles and to recognise how they might feel most comfortable learning.

All the trainees on the course actually do a learning styles inventory. Their results indicate different styles of learning, summarised here:-

Learning Styles - appendix

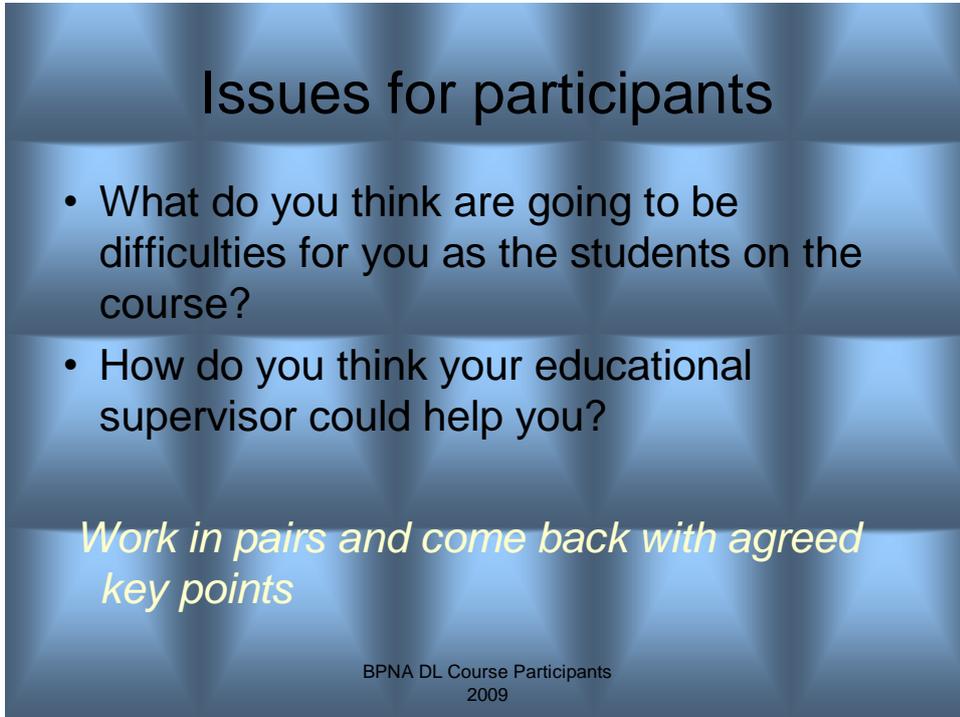
- **Activist**
 - Thrive on new experiences, act first and consider consequences later
- **Reflector**
 - Think before reaching a conclusion, thoughtful people, enjoy observing, act on a whole picture
- **Theorist**
 - Like to fit into logical theory, perfectionists, analyse and synthesis events into a rational scheme
- **Pragmatist**
 - Experiment with new applications, try it out in practice, like to get on with things. Get impatient with endless open-ended discussions

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The main purpose of doing this is also to highlight that not everybody learns in the same way, so being open to how your trainee feels comfortable in their learning may challenge you! It may seem obvious to you that they are approaching their learning in a way that might not work out in practice; in which case you can discuss this (you might be wrong!).

One of the important challenges for you as tutor and facilitator of your students' learning is to challenge them to consider that there is no absolute set of learning skills appropriate for everybody at every stage of their careers. Changing a method of study or learning can be difficult and is unlikely to be achieved just by being given advice. As you support your student through the different styles of learning we introduce them to in this course, you may wish to bear this in mind. If they are having trouble getting to grips with concepts, it might be worth probing a little bit more deeply into how they have gone about learning in this area (for example, if they did not seem to be understanding the fundamental principles behind why a child with a metabolic disorder might present in a particular way you might want to enquire if they had done a little bit of background book work to try to understand the basic science and pathways. Similarly the best way to learn how to interpret scans is by looking at a number with a range of colleagues participating in radiology meetings, thereby taking an active role in learning, or seeking out someone's expert opinion to check whether what you have seen is genuinely there, rather than just sitting in isolation and perhaps reading through a textbook.)

Issues and difficulties for the trainees. Expectations of Tutors



Issues for participants

- What do you think are going to be difficulties for you as the students on the course?
- How do you think your educational supervisor could help you?

Work in pairs and come back with agreed key points

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Your student is asked to make some notes. Please make some notes yourself before you meet with your student. It is perhaps worth spending a couple of minutes thinking through what you think your student might consider to be an issue for them in how they are going to tackle this course. You might want to think about areas such as work patterns, access to resources (textbooks, case notes and clinic visits) or specific personal circumstances. Try to think as broadly as possible and identify which areas may pose challenges for them. Also note down strengths so that you can give them positive feedback perhaps over areas such as how enjoyable this can be, how motivating it is to be learning for the thrill of learning (rather than just passing another exam / hurdle jumping) and learning in your workplace with the immediate relevancy of doing a better job.

In the box for 'issues for Tutors, it might be worth reflecting on what you would hope for, what issues there might be for you as a Tutor, and what your expectations would be of the student. Our feedback shows that students make most progress when the tutor holds an expectation that the students will progress through the course. It is also important to think about what the department as well as you could get out of the trainee doing the course. Is there an opportunity for them to feedback, for example sharing material through presentations? These are good areas to have thought through before you meet with the student: although you may find you have very similar perspectives you may have very different ones as well.

Issues for Trainees	Issues for Educational Supervisors

Commentary:

Trainees and Tutors have highlighted the following advantages:

Many Tutors report that meetings in relation to the distance learning course bring them together with their trainees more frequently than would otherwise have happened. They set aside time to discuss not only the issues in relation to the course but also service delivery, personal problems, the training programme in general and so on.

Concluding paragraph

We hope this period of insight and reflection will have set you and your trainee up well for your first meeting. Thinking the issues through from the perspective of the trainee and from your own perspective as the Tutor is a good way to start. A key point for you to keep in mind is your role as a facilitator of learning and not as a deliverer of teaching.

Good luck and we hope that you enjoy being the Tutor as much as many others have done.

We wish you good luck.

Please don't hesitate to contact the BPNA Secretariat if you have any questions or problems or if you just want to let us know how your group is getting on or send us a photo!:

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