

Quick Guide to Family and House Systems

Creating an inclusive home for learning: We will continue to embrace diversity and **foster belonging among our student body** in London and across the world. (LSE 2030 Strategy).

What do we mean by family and house systems?

Family and house systems are particular forms of *social support* (in contrast to academic and career support mechanisms) that an institution can provide for its members, and primarily address issues of socialisation and integration. While the support roles offered by these systems are usually filled by students, their success requires some form of involvement and guidance on the part of the institution.

System	Description
Family	First year students are 'adopted' by older students who then taken on a mentorship role. These academic 'relations' may be either that of 'parent' or 'sibling'. While one-to-one interactions will play a pivotal part of the relationship, if surrogates are assigned more than one student then group interactions can also be helpful for mentees. While there is a clear social aspect to this relationship, academic 'relations' may, by virtue of being experienced students, also influence and inform academic behaviours. It is therefore advisable that academic 'parents' receive training and support in their roles.
House	Students are assigned a 'house', i.e. affiliation, typically at, or soon after, enrolment. Houses do not necessarily require physical co-location (e.g. residences, department buildings) to be successful, so long as they provide an easily recognisable cohort identity. Moreover, they are not necessarily confined to a single cohort; indeed, it would be preferable to include both older students.

What are the benefits of a family and house system?

Social integration plays an important role in conceptual models of both student success (Kuh et al., 2006) and student persistence (Reason, 2009). Students often identify social integration as being just as central to their university experience as academic integration (Thomas, 2002; Wilcox et al., 2005). The type of content these relationships provide will vary, and may include:

- Instrumental - tangible help providing resources and services
- Informational - information, suggestions and advice to help address problems
- Appraisal support - informing self-evaluation and development
- Emotional support - providing empathy, trust, caring and love

(House, 1981)

House and family systems can provide immediate sources of such support to students from the very start of their university career (Wilcox et al., 2005; Christie et al., 2008). By introducing first year students to older students, who are already well-versed in the norms of the School, house and family systems immediately provide new students with sources of support at a transitional period and enhance their sense of belonging and engagement (Allen et al., 1999). They are also well situated to mitigate barriers or hindrances to socialisation, and thereby increase the opportunities available to students for establishing friendships and relationship networks (Antoniadou, 2017). Moreover, their impact on student well-being can persist; for example, the strong peer networks that may emerge from them can enhance academic achievement, self-motivation and general enjoyment of university life (Peat et al., 2001).

Moreover, social support mechanisms for students are consistently found to be effective in counteracting the potential negative effects of stress, while their perceived absence can lead to negative outcomes (Chao, 2011). This has been particularly noted for diverse student populations, and for international students (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

What do we do next?

While both family and house systems could be run concurrently, each are substantial undertakings and therefore a choice between them should most likely be made. Family systems have already been deployed in some areas of the School; however, these may primarily focus on first year undergraduate students. A

House system is considerably broader in scope, but this means it can offer broader support across all levels of students (including taught postgraduates on single year MSc courses). Regardless of which choice you make, a 2020/21 deployment target is the most realistic, particularly since these systems have their biggest impact at the start of the academic year for incoming students, which gives interested departments considerable leeway for planning and implementation.

Consultation with not only the Teaching and Learning Centre, but also LSE Life and the Health and Wellbeing service is recommended to either inform your choice or to discuss next steps in more detail. In addition to this, you may wish to talk with department/programme Student Union groups and SSLC representatives.

The following are questions that will be important to answer once you have identified a particular social support mechanism:

- What are the various roles your students will play (e.g. types and nature of academic 'parents')?
- What training and support will be available students?
- What is the nature and extent of the role played by your department and its staff?
- What School resources (physical and online) will be required?

LSE examples

- **Management Companions** scheme was set up in 2017/8, allocating all incoming first year students an older student companion playing a similar role to academic parent. The department has now switched to the Student Academic Mentoring programme; however, the extremely high levels of take-up for this has been, in part, attributed to the success of its predecessor, not least due to the large number of 'companions' moving over to the new programme.
- **Geography Families** scheme was started in 2018/9 by the LSE Geography & Environment SU society, and supported by the department. In its first year, it was able to allocate 'parents' to all new first year students.
- **Law Families** scheme was originally an opt-in scheme, for both 'parent' and 'child' students, in the Department of Law run by the LSE Law SU society. In 2018/9, the department formally took over the logistical burden of the scheme, expanding it to all incoming first year students.

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