

Welcome to the UTS HELPS Buddy Program

The Buddy Program has been running since 2013 with very positive feedback from students and volunteers. Thank you for being part of it and we hope you enjoy the experience! If after reading this you have any questions, please email helpsbuddies@uts.edu.au

What's the purpose of the Buddy Program?

- International students improve speaking skills and confidence
- Some buddies take part in language exchange eg. English/French; English/Mandarin
- Students who volunteer to help international students gain volunteer hours for UTS awards (eg BUILD, SOUL and Accomplish)
- Staff and community volunteers have a break from their working week and enjoy the cross cultural experience.
- Everyone has a chance to reach out, give back, make friends and stay connected.

Feedback from students and volunteers:

International students:

- *After having buddy program, my perception of living in Australia has been improved.*
- *I believe that I was blocked to communicate due to the language problems, but I am not blocked to exchange ideas with someone who is willing to listen.*
- *Buddy program really helpful for me to adapt faster in the uni.*

Volunteers:

- *I loved the idea and philosophy behind the program from the beginning. But I hadn't anticipated how much I would enjoy my buddy meetings.*
- *I loved learning about another country without the usual media filters.*
- *It's a great opportunity to volunteer in a meaningful and impactful way.*

What's my role as a Student Volunteer Buddy?

- Catch up with an international student (or 2) for casual conversation.
- 1 hour per week or 30 mins, twice per week – occasionally you might miss a week but it's important to have a regular catch up where possible.
- You are not expected to:
 - Prepare lessons or help with student assignments (send them to HELPS!)
 - Be English language teachers (as fluent speakers, you're perfect)
 - Have contact with students outside the buddy program unless you want to
- Just turn up and chat. Through the weekly conversation, students get the opportunity to improve a range of skills – fluency, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. If you'd like more guidance on helping with language skills go to our guide '**Helping with language skills**'.

What do we talk about?

Anything that interests you – the best part of this program for the students is that it's a real world, 'water cooler' experience. It's not an English class that needs to be prepared.

But if you run out of ideas:

- Ask the students what they would like to talk about – it's gives them the opportunity to initiate conversation in English.
- Other ideas:
 - Their cultural background and experience in Australia – what is different from their country?
 - Their schooling, current studies and future life/career plans.
 - Their travel experiences and yours. Where to travel in their country.
 - Their reasons for wanting to improve English.
- Google news items. If your student has lower language levels, below are links to BBC English – they have short simple videos covering current news which can be a good way to get conversation started.
- Anything about your life experience usually generates good conversation – students love hearing about life in Australia.

Remember people from different backgrounds may be comfortable with different levels of interaction and sharing of personal stories may only occur over time. Your buddy may also have different perspectives and values and it's important to accept that without judgement.

For a list of more conversation topics if you need them go to our '**Conversation topics guide**'.

How do I find my student buddy?

Through our online buddy matching platform where students and volunteers build their profiles and connect with each other.

- The matching platform has an inbuilt messages system (**Inbox**) where you communicate with your students. It went through all the expected UTS Privacy and Records Management procedures. Your photo, email address and details will not be shared with your student without your consent.
- The matching platform is compatible with most browsers, but **Chrome** seems to be the best.
- At any time there can be up to 1000 buddies in the online community, which means some people find their buddy the first day and others take longer. You have the freedom to look for a student buddy based on filters (eg. Faculty, gender, availability) but if you can't find a buddy easily, we can try to match you using our automatic matching function.

- Sign up with your student ID and password at: <https://mentoring.uts.edu.au/hub/helps/home>
- Answer all the questions that will help build your profile
- Follow the link below to watch a short youtube video on how to find a buddy online. It was created for students looking for volunteers but the same process works for you: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAFH75j4ZmU&t=16s>

You can also do this to **find a 2nd student buddy** – some of our volunteers have preferred to meet 2 students at once, in a group of 3 – it's more social and students get value from the listening experience.

Finding students who are available

The platform has a filter you can use to search through students who are currently available. This will help reduce the number of students you contact who already have a buddy. Click on '**Available**' then tick '**Yes, looking for a buddy**' – you will then only see students who have not yet found a buddy.

How do I arrange and record my meetings?

- You can schedule your meetings using the online platform calendar but that's optional. Most people simply message each other to arrange best time to meet.
- Record your meetings in Career Hub [here](#). That helps us see how many people are meeting to measure the success of the program.
- After your 6 meetings you can close your connection in your inbox so that your student can meet other volunteers.

Matching Platform - Troubleshooting

What if I can't find a student buddy online?

If you can't find a student buddy let us know and we will try to match you with someone.

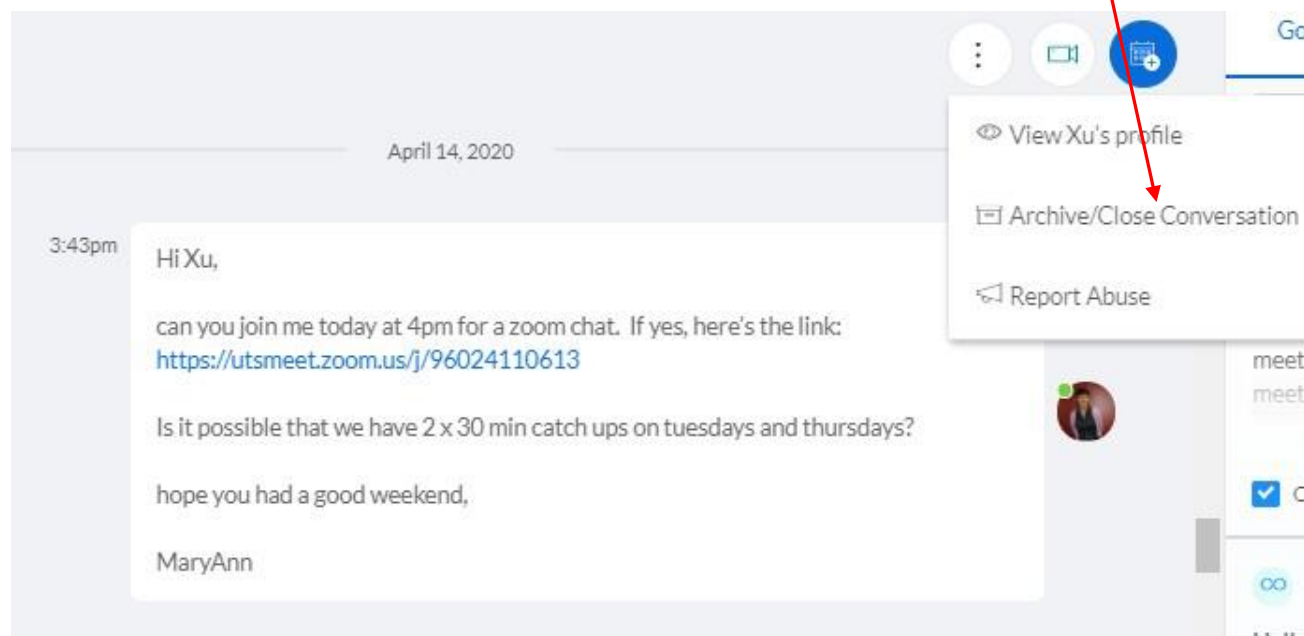
- We can automatically match you, based on faculty.
 - You will receive an email from us that says you have been matched
 - Go back into the online matching platform and Click on your Inbox
 - In your Inbox you will see you are matched with your student and can begin chatting

What do I do if my student buddy doesn't reply or isn't available?

We hope you won't have that problem but it's possible. There are many reasons why students are not available. We communicate regularly with them about how important it is to reply but some are too shy, busy or slow to respond.

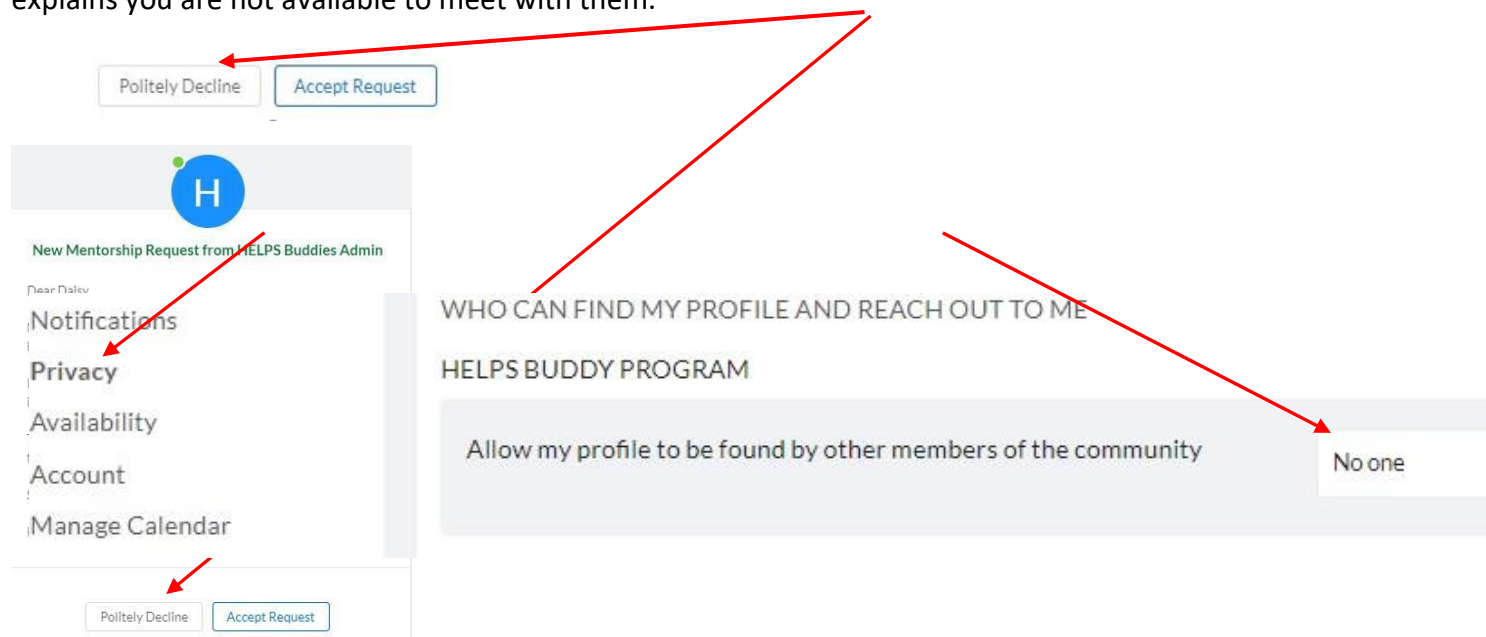
If you find a buddy online yourself after 3 days the connection will automatically close if your student doesn't reply and you can look for a new student buddy

If we matched you with a student and you don't get a reply you can close the connection in your inbox. It's important to do this so you are both free to meet others. If you have any problem – we can do it for you!



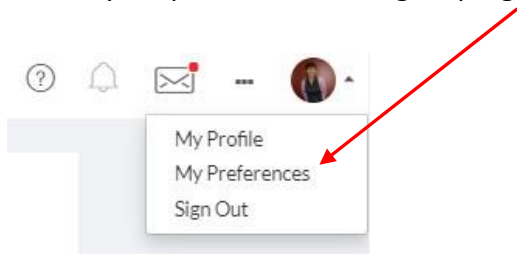
Will I get requests from other students?

Yes, it's possible other students will request you be their buddy but the platform has limited this so you shouldn't get too many. **Important:** If you receive a request you don't want, simply click on the politely decline button. Don't feel bad about doing this – the student will get a very politely worded email that explains you are not available to meet with them.



What if I'm no longer available?

Email us and we'll hide you in the matching platform (helpsbuddies@uts.edu.au) OR you can do it yourself. Go to your preference settings top right corner



Click on **Privacy** then change the setting from 'Everyone' to 'No one'

More information on our HELPS volunteering programs:

<https://www.uts.edu.au/current-students/support/helps/helps-uconnect>