How can we use Personal Tutoring to improve student engagement, retention and success in HE?

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Seminar Plan

- Introductions
- Groupwork
- Feedback from groups
- Presentation: How can we engage staff and students in personal tutoring?
- Discussion

Group 1

1. Why do we have Personal Tutors?

2. Is the concept of Personal Tutors outdated?

3. Would students notice if they didn’t have a Personal Tutor?

4. What would we lose if we abolished Personal Tutoring?

Group 2

1. Who should be a Personal Tutor?

2. Should all academics be Personal Tutors?

3. Should all Personal Tutors be academics?

4. What functions does the role of Personal Tutor cover?

Group 3

1. What is pastoral care?

2. Who needs pastoral care?

3. Why should Personal Tutors get involved in pastoral care? Should they?

4. What is a Personal Tutor's role in pastoral care?

Group 4

1. What do students want from Personal Tutors?

2. Is this realistic? Can we deliver it?

3. Should we give them what they want?

4. How does the new fee structure impact on students' expectations of Personal Tutors?

Importance of Personal Tutors

Literature evidences relationship-building between academics and students as key to students' sense of belonging and future academic success (Hixenbaugh, 2006; Tinto, 1993; Yorke and Longden, 2007)

The person in pole position to support students is their Personal Tutor

Personal Tutor responsibilities

- Facilitating personal development of their tutees
- Monitoring their progress
- Providing a link between student and the university authorities
- Intervening with the university authorities on behalf of their tutees
- Being a person in whom the student can confide (Wheeler and Birtle, 1993)

Personal Tutor models

Pastoral Model: Specific member of staff assigned to each student, giving guidance throughout their degree

Professional Model: Students who approach staff on personal matters are immediately directed to professionals. Requires good links between Faculties and Student Services

Curriculum Model: Timetabled tutorials with PT within the curriculum. Students learn skills, university procedures, PDP, etc (Earwaker, 1992)

What works for students?

Effective personal tutors:

- Have good communication skills ‘listening’
- Care about you
- Make time to see you - accessible
- Know who you are – relationship building
- Are knowledgeable – academic systems
- Offer guidance and advice
- See you as a person ‘a whole person’
- Know where you can go for support

Developing a relationship with your personal tutor depends on their commitment to personal tutoring

PASS: Personal and Academic Support System

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

- Holistic approach to supporting students
- Pro-active personal tutoring through discipline-based group tutorials with PTs
- Delivers academic skills training while building cohort identity, good staff-student working relationships
- Builds peer support within disciplines
- Picks up students with non-academic issues
- Safety net for pastoral support of students

PASS Referral

Safety net for students with personal issues that are interfering with their ability to study

- Any Personal Tutor can refer students and students self-refer
- Use active listening skills to help the student talk about their problems
- Help the student to find their solution
- Refer students on to specialists: counselling, legal or financial advice, accommodation, etc.

The greatest benefit is relational

Compared with other possible benefits of PASS tutorials (eg: skills, peer relationships):

89% said they had enough contact with their Personal Tutor through PASS to feel known as an individual. Of these, **67%** believe this helped them through their first year.

88% felt comfortable enough to turn to their tutor with academic problems. Of these **77%** found this helpful. (N = 68; 38% responses)

What students said...

"I feel it is a great system to get to know your personal tutor and this makes me feel more involved in the Life Science department."

"you can hear other's opinions or difficulties which maybe similar to how you feel or can learn from them"

"if you are struggling and you don't email your personal tutor for some reason, you will have the opportunity in a PASS session."

"… made me feel as a first year student that there were people to talk to if needed…"

General issues for staff

Staff buy in: staff (dis)engagement affects student engagement

Consistency between Personal Tutors

Clearly defined roles

Training for role: eg. listening skills

Academic credibility

Workload planning: proper time allowance

Recognition for ‘student centred’ staff

What works?

Relationships between students and staff:

- Accessibility – availability (office hours)
- Consistency – commitment of all PTs
- Interest and concern – holistic approach

Staff engagement: being alongside students on their journeys

Personal Tutor training: staff development activities, peer support

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