Personal Tutor Survey for Online Distance Learning Students
Key findings

Student Surveys Unit
August 2015
Introduction

Background
The purpose of the survey was to assess the experiences of Online Distance Learning students in relation to the Personal Tutor System, Online Group Meetings and Student Support Teams. This survey was a continuation of similar work conducted with Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students in 2014 & 2015.

Method
Online Distance Learning (ODL) students were invited to take part in an online survey requesting feedback on their experience of the Personal Tutor System in their previous academic year. The ODL Personal Tutor Survey opened on 6th July 2015 and closed on 29th July 2015. The survey used the same questions as used in the Undergraduate and Postgraduate versions of the survey.

Response
In total, 1,807 ODL students were invited to complete the survey. Of that number, 305 completed it meaning an overall University response rate of 17%. This was a slightly lower response rate than the Undergraduate survey (20%) and Postgraduate Survey (21%).

Justification for this report
This report provides an overview of the key results from the survey. Full supporting data is also available on request.

Further information
Contact the Student Surveys Team at student.surveys@ed.ac.uk
Key Findings

**Personal Tutor Meetings**
- 82% of ODL students had participated at least one personal tutor meeting
- Meetings were most likely to be arranged via email with the Personal Tutor
- The amount of preparation students stated they were expected to undertake for meetings was varied, with only a low proportion noting that they were ‘always’ expected to share notes from the meeting with their Personal Tutor
- Over 60% of students were unaware of whether their Personal Tutor had kept a record of the meeting
- The majority of students found the meetings to be helpful (93%)
- [View all Personal Tutor Meeting Results](#)

**Online Group Meetings**
- A high proportion of students (84%) participated in online group meetings, with two thirds of students participating in 5 or more meetings
- The focus of the meetings was predominantly around academic discussion
- Positively, 93% found the meetings to be helpful
- [View all Online Group Meeting Results](#)

**Student Support System**
- Just over a quarter of students sought advice from the Student Support Team, with nearly half of these students contacting them 3-5 times.
- Students were most likely to contact the Student Support Team via email
- Requests for advice mainly related to academic queries
- In the majority of cases, the query was responded to quickly
- 99% of those who used the Student Support Team found the support to be helpful
- [View all Student Support System Results](#)

**Overall support and advice**
- Students stated that their Personal Tutor was generally the first point of contact for queries and concerns
- The majority of ODL students found the overall advice and support to be helpful (88%)
- [View all Overall Support and Advice Results](#)
One to One Meetings with my Personal Tutor
One to one meetings - Participation

• The number of personal tutor meetings participated* in by ODL students during the previous academic year was varied

No. of one to one meetings with Personal Tutor participated in during the previous year

- 67% had participated in 2 or more

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Meetings</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Of those who had not participated in any meetings, students were most likely to state that a meeting was not necessary, or that they had not been advised to participate in a meeting

*For Online Distance Learning students, participation could refer to a variety of communication types, such as a telephone call, or online discussion with the tutor, where attendance in person was not possible.

Base: All respondents answering question (296)
One to one meetings – Meetings arranged with Personal Tutor

- Students were most likely to state that they had been requested to participate in 1-2 meetings with their Personal Tutor during the previous academic year.
- 59% of students arranged additional meetings with their Personal Tutor.

**No. of meetings requested to participate in by my Personal Tutor**

- 31% of students had 0 meetings requested.
- 12% had 1 meeting requested.
- 31% had 2 meetings requested.
- 6% had 3 meetings requested.
- 2% had 4 meetings requested.
- 11% had 5 or more meetings requested.
- 7% could not remember the number of meetings requested.

**No. of additional meetings I arranged**

- 31% arranged 0 additional meetings.
- 22% arranged 1 additional meeting.
- 16% arranged 2 additional meetings.
- 7% arranged 3 additional meetings.
- 4% arranged 4 additional meetings.
- 10% arranged 5 or more additional meetings.
- 11% could not remember the number of additional meetings arranged.

Base: All respondents who participated in a Personal Tutor meeting (233)
One to one meetings – Method used to arrange meeting

- 84% of students stated meetings were arranged via an email with their Personal Tutor
- Others mentioned organising a meeting via MyEd or by telephone with their Personal Tutor

Base: All respondents who participated in a Personal Tutor meeting (240)
One to one meetings – Effectiveness of method for arranging meeting

• Students found most methods for arranging a meeting to be effective

Effectiveness of method for arranging meeting

- **MyEd**: 70% Very effective, 26% Fairly effective, 2% Neither effective nor ineffective
- **Email with Personal Tutor**: 68% Very effective, 28% Fairly effective, 3% Neither effective nor ineffective
- **Telephone with Personal Tutor**: 73% Very effective, 24% Fairly effective, 3% Neither effective nor ineffective
- **In person with Personal Tutor**: 100% Very effective
- **Via the School Office (email/telephone/in person)**: 77% Very effective, 23% Neither effective nor ineffective

*Low base

Base: All respondents who participated in a Personal Tutor meeting (240)
One to one meetings – Preparation and meeting notes

• 22% of students stated that they were ‘always’ expected to prepare material in advance of the meeting, while 34% suggested they sometimes did this.
• Students provided mixed responses with regard to keeping notes from the meeting, with 48% of students stating they ‘always’ or ‘sometimes’ did this.
• Students were least likely to agree that they shared notes with their Personal Tutor - 65% stated they ‘never’ did this.

Base: All respondents who participated in a Personal Tutor meeting (233)
One to one meetings – Record of discussion

- A third of students recalled their Personal Tutor keeping a record of the discussion from the meeting, while almost two thirds were unsure whether any record had been kept.
- Of those who recalled a record of the meeting being kept, 44% stated they could access the notes through MyEd, and 26% through an email from Personal Tutor.

**Record kept of the meeting**

- Yes, 33%
- Don’t know, 65%
- No, 2%

**Access to discussion notes from the meeting**

- MyEd: 44%
- Email from Personal Tutor: 26%
- Paper copy from Personal Tutor: 0%
- Via School Office: 1%
- Didn’t access any notes from the meetings: 29%

Base: All respondents who participated in a Personal Tutor meeting (238)

Base: All respondents recall a record of the discussion being kept (77)
One to one meetings – Helpfulness of meetings

- 93% of ODL students found the meetings with their Personal Tutor to be helpful

Helpfulness of meetings with Personal Tutor

- 93% found the meetings helpful
- 64% Very helpful
- 29% Fairly helpful
- 6% Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- 1% Fairly unhelpful
- 1% Very unhelpful

Base: All respondents who participated in a Personal Tutor meeting (235)
Online Group Meetings
Online Group Meetings - Participation

- 84% of ODL students had participated in an online group meeting with other students studying on their degree programme during the previous academic year.

Proportion who participated in at least one group meeting

- Yes, 84%
- No, 16%

Base: All respondents answering question (288)
Online Group Meetings – Number and size of meetings

- Two thirds of ODL students had participated in 5 or more online group meetings
- Groups of between 2 and 10 students was the most common size

Base: All respondents who participated in a group meeting (254)
Online Group Meetings – Focus of the meetings

- Students were most likely to suggest that meetings were focused around academic programme of study (84%)
- Students were less likely to suggest there was discussion around personal and professional development (18%)

Main focus of group meetings

- 84% To discuss your academic programme of study
- 35% To discuss general academic studies
- 18% To discuss our personal and professional development
- 5% To discuss career development

Base: All respondents who participated in a group meeting (244)
Online Group Meetings – Helpfulness of meetings

- Overall, 93% of students found the online group meetings helpful, with over half finding them ‘very helpful’

Helpfulness of the group meetings

- 93% found the meetings helpful
- 53% found them ‘very helpful’
- 40% found them ‘fairly helpful’
- 6% found them neither helpful nor unhelpful
- 1% found them ‘fairly unhelpful’
- 0% found them ‘very unhelpful’

Base: All respondents who participated in a group meeting (243)
Student Support Teams
Student Support Team – Seeking advice

- Just over a quarter of students sought advice from the Student Support Team during the previous academic year.
- The number of times advice was sought was varied, with 48% of students requesting advice between 3 and 5 times.

Base: All respondents answering question (287) All respondents who contacted the student support team (81)
Student Support Team – Contact with Student Support Team

- Of those students who had contacted their Student Support Team, the majority had made contact via email
- Positively, students generally found all methods to be effective for contacting the Student Support Team

Base: All respondents who contacted the student support team (75)
Student Support Team – Reason for contacting the Student Support Team

- Students were most likely to contact the student support team for academic advice or support
- 92% stated their query had been responded to ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ quickly

### Main reason for contacting Student Support Team

- Academic advice / support: 89%
- Personal advice / support: 20%
- Would rather not say: 4%

### Promptness of request being responded to

- Very quickly: 68%
- Fairly quickly: 24%
- Neither quickly nor slowly: 8%
- Would rather not say: 8%
- Fairly slowly: 0%
- Very slowly: 0%

Base: All respondents who contacted the student support team (75)
Student Support Team – Record of enquiry

- 20% of students recall a record of their enquiry being kept by the Student Support Team, but 80% were not sure whether a record was kept
- Students were most likely to note that a record of their enquiry had been kept via email (73%)

Record of enquiry kept by Student Support Team

- Yes, 20%
- No, 0%
- Don’t know, 80%

Access to notes from enquiry

- MyEd: 20%
- Email: 73%
- Paper Copy: 0%
- Via Student Support Officer: 0%
- Via School Office: 0%
- I didn’t receive any notes about my enquiry: 7%

Base: All respondents who contacted the student support team (74) All respondents who recall a record being kept of enquiry (15)
Student Support Team – Helpfulness

• Positively, 99% of students who had contacted the Student Support Team found the advice they received was helpful, with 72% stating it was ‘very helpful’

Helpfulness of advice received from student support team

99% found the Student Support Team advice helpful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very helpful</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly helpful</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither helpful nor unhelpful</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly unhelpful</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very unhelpful</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All respondents who contacted the student support team (74)
General support and advice – First point of contact for advice

- Students were asked who they would contact first for advice or support regarding a number of situations
- Students stated they were most likely to initially contact their Personal Tutor for support or advice in each situation
- Some students noted they would contact the course organiser for an academic reference
- 23% of students were unsure of who they would contact first regarding Degree Programme transfer options

Who or where would you go first for support or advice about the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Personal Tutor</th>
<th>Student Support Team</th>
<th>School Teaching Organisation / Office</th>
<th>Course Lecturer/Organiser</th>
<th>Central University Department/Service</th>
<th>EUSA</th>
<th>Online Resources</th>
<th>Another Student</th>
<th>Somewhere else</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course choices</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General academic advice / support</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with academic performance or progression</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How you are progressing with your programme of studies</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of career plans</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request for academic reference</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree Programme transfer options</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal problem/special circumstances</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each row, the green shading denotes who students would be most likely to contact first, while red is least likely.

Base: All respondents answering question (283)
General support and advice – Overall experience

- 88% of students found the academic advice and personal support received during the previous academic year to be helpful, with over half of students finding it to be ‘very helpful’ (56%)

Overall rating of academic advice and personal support received

88% found the advice overall helpful

- Very helpful: 56%
- Fairly helpful: 32%
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful: 9%
- Fairly unhelpful: 3%
- Very unhelpful: 0%

Base: All respondents answering question (285)
Suggestions for improvement

• Students provided a variety of comments in response to being asked what one key change they would make to improve the system of academic advice and support.
• Some students requested further support or clarification on what information could be provided. Others noted they were happy with the current system.

Examples of comments provided

- More opportunity for online tutor meetings
- Be clear about what the student support system is for
- Can't think of any. I didn't need the system, but I felt reassured that it would be there in case I needed it
- Need direct interaction, advice and comments from personal tutors
- I found the support, particularly from my personal tutor, to be exemplary and without fault. Easy to contact, very prompt reply and always available.

Base: All respondents answering question (575)
About the respondents
## School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
<th>Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological Sciences, School of</td>
<td>7*</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biomedical Sciences, School of</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business School</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry, School of</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical Sciences, School of</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divinity, School of</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics, School of</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh College of Art</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, The Moray House School of</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering, School of</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GeoSciences, School of</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health in Social Science, School of</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History, Classics and Archaeology, School of</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informatics, School of</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law, School of</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literatures, Languages and Cultures, School of</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics, School of</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine, College of</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>n/a*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molecular, Genetic and Population Health Sciences, School of</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, School of</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics and Astronomy, School of</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Political Science, School of</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinary Studies, Royal (Dick) School of</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>305</strong></td>
<td><strong>1807</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For Biological Sciences and Medicine, it appears that a higher number of students completed the survey than were in the sample. This is because students were asked to self-select the School they belonged to, so it is possible that some students may have selected the wrong School.*