Personal Tutor System

Phase 1 Evaluation

Senior Tutors Meeting 7th March 2014

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Personal Tutor Meetings
Key Finding

Valued but more scheduled meetings desired
(particularly mid-Semester One)
Valued

- Students value their PT meetings – is regarded as an improvement on the DoS system (more consistent) and PTs are seen as accessible and helpful.

- Overall, **75%** of students said meetings with their Personal Tutor had been helpful, with **36%** suggesting meetings were very helpful.
“My personal tutor has been fantastic this past year and I feel really comfortable going to him for advice. We get along really well and he was crucial in helping me when I wanted to change my degree programme”

“My personal tutor was brilliant and helped with so much!”

“I had an excellent Personal Tutor. Every time we spoke everything got sorted quickly. The system worked very well for me”

“Can't think of one - the current system just now is pretty good in all honesty :))”
More scheduled meetings

- Students would like more individual meetings with their PT.

- The initial meeting is regarded as an ice breaker – essential for establishing a rapport with the PT – but a scheduled mid-semester meeting is desired in order to reinforce value of the first meeting (and possibly assist with student retention).

- Students feel that if it is formally required and scheduled then they feel reassured that they aren’t imposing themselves on the PT.

- Students want a mid-semester meeting to focus on the first set of course marks and feedforward.

- Students who had attended two or more meetings were significantly more likely to find the meetings very effective compared to those who had only attended one meeting.
“More regular, timetabled meetings with your personal tutor. Allowing you to get to know them to create a more productive and helpful relationship in which a student may feel more comfortable and less time pressured to ask for advice or guidance”

“I would prefer for the personal tutors to check-in more on our semester progress. Perhaps a mid-semester meeting”

“Make meetings with Personal Tutors more frequent and compulsory. Had I had a few more meetings with my PT last year, I might have known them better, trusted them, and therefore I might have felt able to approach him/her for advice and support”

“More mandatory meetings with PT, making sure that the semester is going as planned and that there's no problems with the courses or otherwise”

“More regular meetings. I feel like he doesn't know me at all apart from my course results”
• Students would like a PT closely matched to their specific programme in order to ensure academic advice and guidance is relevant and to build a relationship based on shared academic interests.
“Personal tutors in our own chosen field of study - I'm in X but my tutor is from Y

Difficult to discuss choices when opinions are different - although still very possible and helpful!”
Personal Tutor continuity

- Students would prefer to have the same PT throughout their studies at the University in order to allow for more consistency and to help foster a more personal relationship.
“Keep same personal tutor for the duration of the degree programme (if possible) then you are familiar with the person, and know that you can rely on them when you need them”

“I have had THREE different ‘Personal Tutors’ over the four years I have been here. I am extremely unimpressed considering how they are supposed to know me well enough to write a personal reference for future jobs”
Preparation and maintaining notes

• Students saw the value of a continuous electronic record but didn’t really want to prepare for meetings or write up notes as this would detract from the valued informality of the PT relationship

• 1 in 10 students said they always prepared material in advance of the meeting, with a further 37% stated they sometimes did this

• Over half of students never prepared material in advance of the meeting

• Students were even less likely to keep notes from the meeting with 10% always keeping notes and 17% sometimes keeping notes from the meetings
Preparation and maintaining notes

• A similar proportion of students always or sometimes shared their notes with the personal tutor (25%).

• However, it was also consistently suggested that a basic standard template of generic questions or points to be covered at meetings would be useful to students to help direct discussions and inform students (and PTs) about their role and expectations.
“Personal Tutor meetings did not seem well recorded and the personal tutor seemed to have too many tutees under her care to know the issues of individual students”

“Make PT meetings compulsory
- with a pre-planned agenda composed by the PT”

“Make personal tutors have a checklist on what they need to ask their students on their studies and personal / non-academic achievements”
Group Meetings
Key Finding

Inconsistent delivery and mixed reception
Inconsistent delivery

• Where group meetings work they work very well and are valued by students – this was usually when the group meetings were integral to a programme of study

• However, many students were either completely unaware of the group meeting requirement or had strong negative views of their experience of a poorly prepared meeting

• Overall, 60% of students attended a group meeting during the previous academic year
“Get rid of group personal tutor meetings - they are pointless”

“Get rid of the compulsory ‘box ticking’ meetings”

“Remove the group meetings at the start of the year, but keep going with the one-on-one personal tutor meetings as they are very useful and you can organise them when you want”
Academic focus

- Discussion at the group meetings was most likely to be focused around the course and other academic discussion.

- Students were most likely (66%) to suggest that discussion around the academic programme and general academic studies were the main focus points of the group meetings.
Purpose and structure needed

• Group meetings would benefit from having more structure around the discussion topics to provide a sense of new information being shared.

• Some students were unclear on the focus of the meetings, which provided less incentive to attend.

• This was particularly relevant for 2nd and 3rd years who found the meetings more beneficial in Year 1.

• A consistent suggestion was that group meetings could be used in years 2 and 3 to help build student confidence during the transition between pre-honours and honours.
“Perhaps remove the group meeting or make the group meeting more interesting/time worthy

Our group meeting consisted of an "ice breaker" type game which felt fairly pointless before being told we could leave”
Sense of community

• Students recognised the value of group meetings in building a sense of community particularly during the early years of their time at the University – a consistent issue across the institution

• Students want more cross-year/cohort peer interaction particularly and would value the opportunity to share knowledge and experience

• This could be accommodated more systematically (and less formally) via the Peer Support initiatives
“Initiate some group meetings where seniors will share their experience with us”

“More meetings with years above so they can give useful tips for getting through the year”

“Help from older students as they have been through it themselves recently”

“It would be beneficial if a system could be set up that allows students about to go into junior honours to discuss their various course options with students who have already taken these courses”
More meetings are more helpful

- Of those who attended a group meeting, attendance was split - half had attended a meeting on one occasion only, while a quarter had attended 5 or more meetings.

- Overall, 66% of students found the Group Meetings to be helpful, with 19% of students suggesting the meetings were very helpful.

- Those who attended 4 or more meetings were significantly more likely to have found the meetings to be very helpful, so formalising a purpose for continued sessions would be worthwhile.
“Instead of the group meetings that PTs are holding each semester and which cover rather obvious material (such as note taking) I'd recommend that PTs built a stronger, more personal and private connection with their students by less formal meetings (such as dinner/lunch?)”
Student Support Teams
Key Finding

Anonymous

we need to raise the profile of the SSTs
Anonymous Student Support Officers/Teams (SSTs)

• Students consistently stated that they were completely unaware of the role or presence of an SSO or SST within their School

• During the previous academic year, 17% of students sought advice from the Student Support Team

• This appears to be an under-used resource which could be placing an additional load on PTs (seen as the first point of contact within the system)

• Students suggested that this situation could be improved by making the SSO more “visible” around the building (e.g. by posters) and also by introducing them at Freshers Week inductions and asking the PTs to mention where the Office is and what it is for during the first individual meeting
“I personally am not aware that there is a Student Support Team, so maybe advertise them a bit more and explain what they do would be helpful

This question has talked about the 'student support team', but I am not really sure who/what that is - so more awareness of that might be good

“Clearer indication of who does what including more awareness of where to go in certain situations. Perhaps posters in the buildings to advertise which team does what or where to go in X situation etc.”

“I don't know what is meant by student support team - this could be clearer”

“Students need to be aware of the resources available to them and precisely what they are there for”

“Case in point, I have no idea what the Student Support Office is for - where are they located? what do they do? what kind of support can they give me?”
Helpful and efficient

- The majority of students that did used the SST found the advice to be helpful.

- In most cases, students felt that queries had been responded to quickly (91%), with over half stating their query had been responded to very quickly.

- Overall, 88% of students who had requested advice from the Student Support Team found the advice to be helpful, with 42% suggesting the advice was very helpful.
“The student support system was helpful when making course choices as discussion on different "routes" was useful
Advice

- The reason for contacting the SST was most likely to relate to academic advice and support (75%) although 46% also stated they had contacted the support team for personal advice and support.
“The student support system was helpful when making course choices as discussion on different "routes" was useful
Overall Support
Key Finding

Good experiences overall, but some better than others

more consistency needed
Inconsistency

• There seems to be a generally sense that the system, while more consistent than the previous DoS system, is being delivered somewhat inconsistently.

• When it works it works very well but some students did seem to resent the good fortune of those with excellent Personal Tutors.

• There needs to be more consistency of delivery with the right ‘type’ of Personal Tutors appointed and rewarded for providing a quality student experience.
“Purge the personal tutors and remove all those who simply do it because they have to in order to earn part of their pay check”

“Interview PTs to make sure they want to do it and will actually be useful to the students. Mine is fantastic but many people I know have very unhelpful tutors”

“Personal tutor meetings being more highly valued and recognised as a crucial part of student development, progression and wellbeing”

“Although I’ve been lucky enough to get an amazing PT, many of my friends have lecturers who couldn’t care less about their students and deliberately keep meetings as quick as possible to get them over”

“I’m not sure of the best way to fix this (bonuses for those with highest PT satisfaction? More money for research - the only thing they really care about?) but as it is, they are the last people many of my friends would go to for help”
“Make sure the lecturers/professors you choose to become personal tutors care about the system”

“Make sure the personal tutors actually WANT to be personal tutors. My last one didn't seem very fussed about any of us”

“Better consistency from personal tutors, some friends has personal tutors who contacted them regularly, arranged tutor group social gathering etc. I barely heard from mine, either situation is fine, but a little consistency in the support offered would be appreciated”

“It would be very helpful if the personal tutors actually wanted to be personal tutors (assuming that it is not by choice). I get the impression from mine that she has lots of other stuff to do and only really wants to hear from us if there is a huge problem. But because of this, when I have had a huge problem, I don't want to go to her because I don't feel comfortable and then we are left to deal with everything ourselves. In my experience, I would have been just as well not having a personal tutor at all”
Personal Tutors are considered the first point of contact

- In many cases, students see the PT as the first point of contact if they cannot source the information through online sources
- Students were asked who they would contact first when requiring advice for a number of situations - in 6 out of 8 situations, students were most likely to suggest they would contact their Personal Tutor first
- This was most likely to be the case for academic advice, references, and degree transfers, but also for Personal problems
- Raising the profile of the SSOs/SSTs may help spread some of this load
More guidance on roles and expectations

• In order to instil more confidence in students as users of the system and to help them engage, more guidance on roles and expectations would be useful – students are still uncertain about what to expect (and what not to expect) from their PT

“I think it should be clearly stated what the personal tutor and student support system are for in advance so students know what issues they can discuss and who to go to”
MyEd and online tools

• MyEd is perceived as slow, unresponsive and impersonal and therefore underused and unloved

• Almost three quarters of Students stated that meetings had been set up via an email with the Personal Tutor with 29% of students saying meetings had been arranged through MyEd
“Introduce a more user friendly MyEd interface specifically for academic advice and support”

“Take away the MyEd communication with Personal Tutor - it is not as quick and convenient as email”

“MyEd is confusing and often doesn't work correctly. For example today Learn is not working. Whilst it is helpful in some aspects it is as a whole very unreliable”
Helpful advice and support in the last year

- Positively, students found the advice and support received in the last year from the University overall to be helpful, although the proportion finding the information very helpful could be improved.

- When thinking about the experience of academic advice and personal support in the previous year, 78% of students stated that they had found the advice to be helpful, with 28% suggesting it had been very helpful overall.
“I personally had a great personal tutor who saw me regularly and kept in touch well. I would not change the current system”

“No key changes, as long as the personal tutor is responsive to your meeting requests and is helpful then it is a good system”

“Please try to assign fewer students to a personal tutor so that each of them would receive more attention from their personal tutor”

“Fewer students for each member staff would be lovely, but I expect that would be a very difficult thing to do!”
Summary

- Inconsistency of quality and effectiveness of individual Personal Tutors
- More scheduled 1-1 meetings; particularly mid-semester
- Preparation for meetings and effective note taking, reflection and actions
- Future of group meetings - inconsistent, purpose, ‘transition’ and sense of community
- Current anonymity of Student Support Teams