Enhancing Student Support – Senior Tutor Network

Meeting from 13.00 – 14.30 on Tuesday 25 September 2012
Conference Room, Joseph Black Building, Kings Buildings

Action Notes

Convenor
Professor Alan Murray, Dean of Students, CSE

CHSS
Dr Arianna Andreangeli, Law
Dr Matthew Chrisman, Philosophy, Psychology and Language Science
Professor Peter Higgins, Dean of Students
Dr Colin Roberts, Economics
Mr Arno Verhoeven, Edinburgh College of Art

MVM
Dr Margaret Cullen, MBChB
Dr Philip Larkman, Biomedical Sciences
Dr Geoffrey Pearson, Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies

CSE
Dr Judy Hardy, Physics and Astronomy
Professor Simon Harley, GeoSciences
Dr Steven Henderson, Chemistry
Dr Paul Jackson, Informatics
Dr Donald Macleod, Biological Sciences
Dr Martin Reekie, Engineering
Dr Maximilian Ruffert, Mathematics

Institute for Academic Development (IAD)
Dr Jon Turner, Director

IT Tools
Ms Sheila Fraser, Project Services Team Manager, IS Applications Division
Mr Chris Giles, Student Admissions and Curricula Systems

Student Support Services Project Strand
Dr Sue Rigby, Vice Principal

Project Team
Ms Nichola Kett, Academic Services
Professor Ian Pirie, Assistant Principal
Ms Sara Welham, Academic Services/IAD

1. Apologies

Apologies received were noted by the Convenor.

2. Note from the last meeting

The notes from the last meeting were approved.
3. **Matter Arising**

It was noted that the guidance for students on the consequences of not engaging with the Personal Tutor system was still to be developed.

| Action: Ian Pirie and EUSA. |

4. **Resource materials, briefing and training**

Jon Turner advised that a paper outlining the priorities for Phase 2 in relation to resource materials, briefing and training will be brought to a future meeting of the Network. Members were asked to provide guidance on any current needs and also to identify requirements for Phase 2. This information will then be shared with the Deans of Students.

| Action: Members to provide guidance on current needs and identified requirements for Phase 2 to Jon Turner (email: J.D.Turner@ed.ac.uk). |

It was noted that the Counselling Service and Careers Service are able to provide support for Senior Tutors and it was agreed that staff from relevant support services would be invited to future meetings of the Network.

| Action: Nichola Kett to note for future meetings. |

**Feedback**

With reference to the University’s National Student Survey results on feedback, Sue Rigby highlighted the recent findings by the National Union of Students on the effectiveness of one-to-one meetings in the provision of feedback. The possibility of capitalising on the one-to-one meetings that are already taking place between Personal Tutors and tutees was discussed. Members noted that it was important that students understand what it meant by feedback. They also agreed that, whilst Personal Tutors would not be best placed to provide subject-specific feedback, they could provide generic feedback and there may be merit in providing Personal Tutors with training on difficult discussions (such as when a student is in academic difficulty).

| Action: A future meeting of the Network to focus on feedback and will be facilitated by Sue Rigby (Nichola Kett to organise). |

5. **IT Systems for Personal Tutor support**

**General Points**

It was agreed that it was important to wait for the Personal Tutors systems and processes to bed in before any major changes or developments for the IT System are decided upon.

Members are referred to the list of the requests for improvements to the ESS initial functions with the IT Tools that are being gathered on the Initial ESS IT Tools wiki at: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/SSG001/Small-scale+enhancements+for+staff and https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/SSG001/Small-scale+enhancements+for+students

Members also suggested a number of additional developments (listed below under the relevant headings) and it was agreed that the Network should contribute to the prioritisation of the suggested enhancements.

Some Senior Tutors reported a short delay between an interaction within the IT Tools taking place and receiving a notification email during fresher’s week. Sheila Fraser advised that
this would not be related to the Personal Tutors IT Tools, but would likely be linked to the batch processing of emails.

5.1 Overload on SSO teams from meeting requests

Identified issues:
- A Senior Tutor advised that the Student Support Team (SST) members within their School did not know that requests for meetings would be sent only to them and not to Personal Tutors.
- Several Senior Tutors advised that during fresher’s week, SST members are often away from their desks and/or have extremely busy workloads and this resulted in responses to meeting requests being delayed.
- It was unclear how SST members would easily follow up meeting requests once they had been forwarded to the Personal Tutor.

Agreement/actions:
- It was unanimously agreed that the IT Tools notifications structure should be changed so that Personal Tutors also receive meeting request notifications. Schools should ensure that the process for dealing with such requests is clear to all relevant members of staff.

**Action:** Sheila Fraser and Senior Tutors.

- That further discussion on practical matters to be dealt with at the start of semester (such as setting up of meetings and confirmation of attendance) take place at a future meeting of the Network.

**Action:** Nichola Kett to note for future meetings.

Suggested developments:
- The ability to email groups of tutees using the IT Tools.
- The use of pre-populated text which can be added to the notes facility to assist Personal Tutors and SSTs with the management of meeting requests.

**Virtual Meetings**

Members also discussed virtual meetings which are being used across the University where students are away (for example on ERASMUS exchange or placement) and within the Schools of Law and Economics. If a virtual meeting has taken place, this may be recorded in the same manner as a face-to-face meeting within the IT Tools. It was noted that the use of virtual meetings will be monitored within phase 1 and feedback will be sought from schools.

5.2 Confidentiality of Personal Tutor/Tutee notes

Identified issues:
- Concern has been expressed by students and staff within some schools regarding the confidentiality of notes, whilst some schools reported that students and staff were content with the agreed approach.
- The importance of students and staff having confidence and trust in the notes facility was stressed by Senior Tutors.
- A Senior Tutor asked for further consideration to be given to the agreed core group who see notes marked as confidential, with particular reference to Student Support Team members.
- A few Senior Tutors also contemplated if the default setting for a note should be confidential in order to stop accidental disclosure.
Different categories of information were becoming evident. One such category is information of a highly confidential nature that it is not appropriate to post details of within the IT Tools, but should be accessible if required by appropriate members of staff in the absence of the Personal Tutor.

The awareness that if students asked for information to remain confidential between them and the Senior Tutor then no further action to remediate the situation can be taken.

It is not currently possible to edit or delete a note once it has been saved.

Agreement/actions:
- Sheila Fraser confirmed that it will soon be possible for a note to be flagged as deleted.
- That guidance is issued to those using the IT Tools as a matter of urgency on the categories of information and advice on how to record such interactions. As part of this guidance, schools should be asked to ensure that they have a documented process for dealing with highly confidential matters.

Action: Alan Murray and Ian Pirie.

- That a group of Network members, convened by Jon Turner, work to create scenarios of interactions between Personal Tutors and tutees and how these could be recorded (both within and out with the IT Tools as appropriate).

Action: Jon Turner.

Suggested developments:
- The use of pre-populated text which can be added to the notes facility to assist Personal Tutors with the recording and management of confidential issues.

5.3 The divide between official notes and emails

Identified issues:
- Students using the notes function for everyday communication which results in important matters being lost.
- Email communication taking place between Personal Tutors and tutees means that important matters need to be added to the notes function.
- Confirmation of who the audience of the notes are was sought – are they addressing the student or should they be written in the third person as an official record?
- The notes facility was found to be more complicated to navigate for those who had previously stored their email interactions with tutees within Outlook in a folder structure, notably because there is not a search facility.

Agreement/actions:
- It was confirmed that it is possible to cut and paste content from email correspondence into the notes facility, if required.
- The audience for routine matters within the notes facility should normally be the student. Where formal matters are being recorded, such as progressions meetings, the audience would normally change to being written in the third person.
- As a general rule, routine matters may be discussed through email communication, but where matters stray into formal discussion they should be recorded within the notes facility.

Suggested developments:
- Implementation of a folder structure within the notes facility.
Clarification of the function of the IT Tools: are they a communication tool or an official record?

5.4 EUCLID difficulties – post mortem and future

It was confirmed that the issues experienced with EUCLID during fresher’s week were not due to the Personal Tutor IT Tools. Members noted that the performance of EUCLID during this time was unacceptable and had had a severe impact on Personal Tutors ability to carry out their responsibilities, which in turn severely impacted on morale and trust in the system.

Members agreed that it, if possible, a test activity should be carried out by Personal Tutors on the IT Tools to provide reassurance.

**Action:** Sheila Fraser to explore possible tests that could be carried out.

6. Personal Tutor Tutee Numbers

The following information is currently being collated by the Dean of Students in CSE:
- Number of students per Personal Tutor
- Number of Personal Tutors per School
- Number of Personal Tutors per School as a percentage of total academic staff

Information is available from the information held within the Personal Tutor IT Tools.

7. EUSA Information Sheet

The information sheet was noted.

8. AOCB

IT Tools Reporting

Chris Giles asked that members provide him with guidance on the routine and ad hoc reporting requirements for Senior Tutors using information from within the IT Tools.

**Action:** Members to email requirements to Chris Giles (email: Chris.giles@ed.ac.uk).

IT Tools Developments

Sheila Fraser advised that new notes functions to flag as deleted and to add a file will be available in the coming weeks, in addition Personal Tutors will soon be able to filter students who do not have a meeting, students who have had a meeting but where no note has been added, and students who have had no notes at all.

9. Date of Next Meeting

Monday 15 October 2012, 1-2.30pm, venue to be confirmed.

Nichola Kett
28 September 2012