Enhancing Student Support (ESS)
Senior Tutor Network (STN)

Meeting held on Tuesday 12 November 2013
in Room 712, Darwin Building, King’s Buildings

Notes

Convener:  
Professor Alan Murray, Dean of Students, CSE.

College of Humanities and Social Science:  
Dr Arianna Andreangeli, Law (UG); Dr Matthew Chrisman, Philosophy, Psychology and Language Science (UG & PGT); Richard Easton, Education (PGT); Professor Tonks Fawcett, Health in Social Science (UG & PGT); Professor Pete Higgins, Dean of Students, CHSS; Neil Houston, Education (UG); Dr Colin Roberts, Economics (UG); Arno Verhoeven, Edinburgh College of Art (UG); Dr Julian Ward, Literatures, Languages and Cultures (UG);

College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine:  
Professor Allan Cumming, Dean of Students, CMVM.

College of Science and Engineering:  
Dr Judy Hardy, Physics and Astronomy (UG & PGT); Dr Maximilian Ruffert, Mathematics (UG); Dr Simon Smith, Engineering (UG & PGT);

Central Services:  
Mr Franck Bergeret, Project Manager: IT Tools, Information Services; Mr Brian Connolly, Project Manager: ESS, Academic Registry; Gavin Douglas, SASG, Dr Daphne Loads, Academic Developer, IAD; ? Student Counselling; Barry Neilson, Director, SACS;

1. Notes of the last meeting
   
   The notes were approved.

2. Matters arising
   
   There were no matters arising.

3. Feedback on the Personal Tutoring system

3.1 The Convenor thanked all involved with the planning and implementation of the Personal Tutor system for postgraduate taught (PGT) students and in particular Richard Arkless (Student, Admissions & Curricula Systems) and Franck Bergeret (Project Manager: IT Tools, Information Services) for their work developing the IT Tools element of the system. It was agreed that the final report from the PGT Task Group would now be placed on the project wiki. Members were invited to discuss their experiences of the start of the new academic session, particularly in relation to the implementation of the Personal Tutor system for PGT students.

3.2 Timetabling

   Members discussed the impact of the withdrawal of the new timetabling system at the beginning of the academic year. Members agreed that, while the principles behind the development were admirable and would be useful, the implementation had been poorly
managed. It was noted that there was deep and widespread frustration at the problems encountered due to the implementation failure. Had it not been for amelioration steps taken by staff across the schools the impact on the student experience would have been far more severe. The disruption had been particularly acute where students were taking courses in other schools. It was agreed that senior management must be made aware of the detrimental impact in terms of staff time, resources and goodwill and the potential reputational damage to the institution as a whole.

**Action:** SSIG to convey to senior management the issues raised in relation the impact of the withdrawal new timetabling system at the beginning of the academic year.

### 3.3 Student Progression

Members discussed issues surrounding student progression. It was noted that the delays caused by the current system of recoding marks, particularly the requirement that data must be sent to the Academic Registry for inputting, had a detrimental impact on progression decisions in schools. It was agreed that clarity was needed with regard whether this current procedure was due to the technical limitations of EUCLID or the perceived merits of recording information centrally.

### 3.4 Course Sign-up

Members also noted that the process for students changing their programmes or for signing up for courses varied widely across the institution. It was agreed that a standard approach via EUCLID was required.

**Action:** Director of Student Admissions & Curricula Systems to be invited to the next meeting.

### 3.5 Meeting Requests

Members reported that some Personal Tutors had felt inundated by meeting requests from students before the semester had begun due to the decision to populate the PT channel in July with PT and SST details. However, it was also noted that some schools positively encourage students to engage before the start of the semester. In either case the group email or group note functions within PT tools could be used to welcome new students and inform them about plans for setting up their first meeting. This would reduce the number of students requesting meetings before the schools have had a chance to schedule them.

### 3.6 Disciplinary Guidance

Members noted that some staff less suited to the role of Personal Tutor may be allocated tutees in order to keep PT/Tutee ratios down. In this context, should disciplinary issues arise, Senior Tutors would like more guidance on how to manage recalcitrant colleagues.

**Action:** SSIG to discuss disciplinary guidance in relation to the Senior Tutor role.

### 3.7 Grade 7

Members suggested that, in light of concerns regarding PT/Tutee ratios, the PT role could be opened up to Grade 7 staff. The Convenor noted that early in the development of the Personal Tutor system SSIG made the decision that the Personal Tutor role should be a Grade 8 to reflect the expectations and responsibilities associated within the new system and to ensure that the role was not undervalued by being undertaken at a lower grade. This was not a reflection on the quality of Grade 7 staff but rather to ensure that the duties and level of responsibility associated with the PT role was recognised and remunerated.
3.8 Appraisal

Members noted that the PT role was not part of the formal appraisal process yet. The Convenor noted that there was a need to ensure a standardised approach to PT appraisal and to ensure that the role was maintained as a constant element during school workload planning rounds.

4. IT Tools Developments

The IT Tools Project Manager noted that there was no current funding for further PT system IT Tools enhancements. However, further training sessions could be arranged in line with demand. Members agreed that the training sessions and in particular the online video tutorials were excellent. Members were invited to send enhancement suggestions to the IT Tools Project Manager for consideration should resources be made available.

Members noted the following issues: the need to group email addresses with commas (as semi-colons are problematic for Apple software); the need to send student group emails via blind carbon copy (to ensure anonymity); the need for a new student 'unassigned' flag.

Action: IT Tools Project Manager to report back to the next meeting of the Network regarding the IT issues noted.

5. Monitoring, Evaluation and Enhancement - Semi-Structured Focus Groups

The ESS Project Manager thanked staff for all their help with the Personal Tutor and Student Support System Evaluation Survey. The data would now be analysed and used to direct the semi-structured focus groups which constituted the next phase of the monitoring and evaluation process for the Personal Tutor system.

The second phase of the evaluation would be conducted via semi-structured focus groups with a representative sample of second and third year students in each School and would each be facilitated by a senior tutor and two student support officers. The second phase of the evaluation adopts a critical friend model and aims to provide both objective neutrality and a supportive environment for students and staff of the School while their approach and implementation of the Personal Tutor system is being reviewed.

The senior tutor and student support officers comprising each team would be selected from three different Schools: each team would conduct one focus group with their allocated School. The questions that form the basis for the semi-structured focus groups would be derived from the analysis of the survey results and would be specific and unique to each School. Of particular relevance would be the responses to the single free text question in the survey which should provide insights to the types of developments students would value as the Personal Tutor system develops.

A structured report with the findings of the focus groups would be completed for each School and an analysis of all the Schools’ reports would identify key themes to inform further development of the system.

Academic Registry would support the organisation of the focus groups and once the review teams are formed IAD would provide training and support for colleagues to facilitate the running of the focus groups.

It is hoped that the experience of running the focus groups would also provide a learning opportunity for all staff involved in understanding the strengths, successes and challenges of developing the PT system in each of our Schools and the knowledge gained would subsequently be shared initially within the ST and SST networks.
The final stage of the evaluation would bring the information from the online survey, focus groups, statistics derived from the personal tutor system and EUCLID data together. An analysis of the complete set of data for all Schools would then be conducted by Academic Services to derive the key features and attributes of positive practice and also to identify where students collectively are highlighting issues where further development is needed.

6. Peer-Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS)

The Peer Support Project Officer (EUSA) updated the Network on developments particularly in relation to the PALs attendance monitoring request to schools. It was noted that the reason for monitoring attendance was that research indicated that attendance at PALS sessions can have a beneficial impact on academic performance - which is markedly increased if students attend four or more sessions. Therefore, EUSA would like to use the attendance stats to access the impact of PALS at the University.

One SSO (or other administrative staff team member) in each school has been asked to record PALS attendance on the PT IT Tools system (from attendance sheets completed by each PALS Student Leader). Attendance is collected by name and matric number and is only for internal use within EUSA and the University for evaluating the success of the schemes (this will be anonymised if re-produced for external use).

Members noted concerns in relation to the resources required (both staff and time), the volume of PT Tool email alerts created by the system, and the need for and use of the data.

Action: Peer Support Project Officer to provide all staff involved with greater clarity in relation to the reasons behind the attendance monitoring request.

7. AOB

There was no other competent business.

8. Dates of Next Meetings:

- **Wednesday 9 April 2014 (Away Day)** between 1-5pm in Playfair Library, Old College
- **Tuesday 17 June 2014** between 2-4pm in Raeburn Room, Old College