Students say they value relationships with Personal Tutors: how can we promote staff and student engagement?

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Programme

- Context of Study
- Transition to University
- University Support Structures
- Personal Tutor Roles and Models
- PASS in Life Sciences – example of student support in an academic School
- Importance of Supporting Students
Background

- What works? Collaborative projects on student retention and success funded by HEFCE & Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2008-11

- What works? Exploring personal tutoring for student success University of Reading and Oxford Brookes University

- Survey and interview data on students’ expectations and experiences of the various personal tutor systems
- Interviews with personal tutors
- Examples of how different Schools manage personal tutoring
Different Approaches

INTERVENTIONIST
Oxford Brookes University
School of Life Sciences

PASS: Personal &
Academic Support System

Pro-active personal tutoring:
a co-ordinated and holistic approach

AN OPT-IN SUPPORT SYSTEM
University of Reading

Study skills + Student Services (One stop shop)

Reactive or responsive personal tutoring system
Context of the Study

Oxford Brookes University:

- teaches around 18,000 students across all levels and modes of study
- student profile comprises 18% international students from over 100 countries (including EU)
- Approximately 70% of students study full time
- Almost 75% of students are Undergraduates
- 75% of UGs come from state schools and
- about 20% come from Oxfordshire (local)
Transition to University

- Relocation: making the move from home to university
- Domestication: learning to live independently
- Integration: mixing with different people
- Lifestyle issues: making independent choices
Support Networks

- What were students’ previous support networks?
- Family, friends, peer group, teachers, work colleagues, social and sports groups
- Student priorities?
- Building new networks: making friends and meeting colleagues
- University social life: clubs, sports, societies, residential social groups
Academic Issues and Transition

1. What are the differences between teaching at school and university?
2. What are the differences in assessment methods and patterns?
3. How can we communicate these changes?
4. How can we support students as they adjust to these changes?
## Experiences and Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>University</th>
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<tr>
<td>Taught to a strict syllabus, to learn key phrases that they must remember and regurgitate, not to read widely</td>
<td>Want them to be open and exploratory in their thinking, to read widely, go beyond the basic syllabus</td>
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<td>Resubmit coursework a number of times until they get high enough grades</td>
<td>Expect to receive completed coursework for assessment and don’t allow resubmission</td>
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<td>Retake modules to improve their marks and achieve higher A level grades</td>
<td>Module grades are final. Any resit is capped at a bare pass (40%). Can’t repeat modules to raise average mark</td>
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Effect of Transition Issues

- How does all this change impact on students as they walk into our teaching rooms?
- What are their priorities and how do these affect their approach to academic work?
- How can we help students adjust to their new life at university?
- What student support can we build into your structures?
Support Issues for Students

- **Academic:**
  - Advice on University regulations; Programme issues; Timetabling; Course changes; Withdrawal; Appeals and complaints

- **Personal:**
  - e.g: Illness and Mitigating Circumstances; Finance; Study skills; International students; Disabilities
General UK model of student support

- Each student has a named academic who is their **Personal Tutor**, responsible for academic and pastoral support.

- **Student Services** provides central university support: eg, counselling; disability support; careers; accommodation; financial aid.

- **Students’ Union** provides advice: eg, legal; financial; disciplinary.
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 Tutoring 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
What students say…

“Personal Tutors have to be able to judge how best to talk to people… our tutor says things in a jokey way that I know other people take seriously… he’s a bit sarcastic. If someone comes to you and they are really upset about something, you don’t want to use sarcasm.”

“It’s being reassured you can do it… we come into this strange environment… you need a personal tutor who is there for you… who understands students and helps them achieve something.”
PASS:
Personal and Academic Support System
School of Life Sciences
PASS Model in Life Sciences

3 types of support:

- **Target:**
  - All First Year Students
  - Students with Resits
  - Badly Failing Students

- **Delivered by:**
  - Personal tutors
  - Module Leaders
  - Mentors: Head of Student Support (Personal Tutors)

PASS monitoring by Student Support Co-ordinator

**PASS Referral** to Head of Student Support underpins pastoral/personal issues
PASS: Pro-active Student Support

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

- Oversee the academic progression of their tutees
- Encourage realistic academic expectations, re: careers, write references
- Teach students academic skills through structured activities
- Important contact for a student needing help or advice
- Be a role model for the next generation of scientists
Role of PASS tutorials

- Establish good staff/student interactions
- Discipline-based groups for academic advice
- Provide academic skills training
- Build peer support
- Nurture students
PASS Referral

- Safety net for students with personal issues that are interfering with their ability to study
- Any Personal Tutor can refer students to me and students self-refer
- Use active listening skills to help the student talk about their problems
- Help the student to find a solution
- Refer students on to specialists: counselling, legal or financial advice, accommodation, etc.
PASS Referral

- 2010-11: 74 students had 144 meetings:
  - Students from all year groups
  - 39 had one meeting with me
  - 27 had 2 or 3 meetings
  - 8 had 4 or more meetings
  - Increasing number of students with severe difficulties: mental illness, depression, abuse, addictions, family concerns (illness, bereavement, break-up)
PASS Intervention

- Failing students given appointments for individual interviews to discuss their results and offer extra support.
- Support available was mentoring, 1:1 study skills and/or maths tutorials, and counselling.
- Main reason for failure: poor time / task management
- Mentoring through follow up interviews
As a new member of staff I have been particularly impressed with the PASS system as a means of student support. It is an organised and effective means of both supporting students and providing essential guidance and information.

PASS sessions provide a forum for students to discuss problems both with me and their peers. The sessions are very well organised and ensure that all students are familiar with basic skills such as note-taking, referencing, planning, exam revision to name but a few.
PASS tutorials, what students said....

- They’ve all been very, very helpful and constructive. The referencing one was brilliant; otherwise my referencing would have been horrendously wrong!

- ...the choices thing was particularly useful, because I was really struggling with my choices (second year programme choices)...

- [PASS]... is another side of the way she (Personal Tutor) helps us, she went through a lot of different ways to study and everything, which was helpful...

- It’s kind of...just making you...reflect on yourself.

- I’m really happy with the PASS tutorials...I got to meet new people as well, which is good.
More student comments…

- “I feel it is a great system to get to know your personal tutor and this makes me feel more involved in the Life Sciences 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.” (to talk to them)

- “… made me feel as a first year student that there were people to talk to if needed…”
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)
Student thoughts on Personal Tutors

- I think the role...is someone you know within the establishment, who, when you think everything’s just a bit too much, can just save you a bit...
- She told me who to speak to, and she offered me some ideas...which was good
- He’s very student-oriented... easy to talk to...
- It’s just nice whenever I have something on my mind I usually go and chat to [my Personal Tutor] about it...
The greatest challenge is staff engagement

64% of students in the survey thought that their Personal Tutor ‘believed in’ the importance of PASS tutorials. The experience of the remaining 36% of students is of concern:

“I think PASS tutorials would work well if my Personal Tutor was engaged more in what had to be done.”

“I think [PASS] is successful but feel that it depends on the Personal Tutor. Unfortunately the attitude and lack of interest or commitment to [PASS] on the side of the tutor can play a large part in affecting how the student views the tutor’s role and the effectiveness of [PASS].”
PASS tutorial delivery and student attendance

![Bar chart showing PASS tutorial delivery and student attendance from 2005/6 to 2009/10. The chart indicates a steady increase in staff tutorial delivery and student attendance over the years.]
How to increase staff engagement

Staff said they would like to be entrusted with more responsibility for the tutorials:

- more clarity and less detail in their instructions
- freedom to deliver tutorials in their own way, less directive, more responsive

This would increase their engagement with content and student issues, such as independent and reflective learning
Response to staff concerns

- Onus for how tutorials are delivered has shifted from the centre to the tutor
- Tutorial materials are less prescriptive, outlining learning outcomes for each tutorial but delivery left to the tutor
- Ideas for teaching the skills + materials available if tutors choose to use them
- PASS end of semester lunch (appreciation)
- Positive feedback to changes to tutorials
General Issues for Staff

- Staff buy in
- Clearly defined roles
- Consistency between Personal Tutors
- Staff engagement affects student engagement
- Academic credibility
- Training for role: eg. listening skills
- Workload planning: proper time allowance
- Recognition for ‘student centred’ staff
Issues for Students

- Clarity of PT role for students
- Clear purpose of the PT role
- Consistency between PTs
- Student owning the relationship: two-way engagement
- Academic credibility
- Structure to meetings (agendas?)
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 courses, peer support
Importance of supporting students

- We have a duty of care: once we have welcomed students into our university we have a responsibility to look out for them.

- National Students’ Satisfaction survey: graduating students give feedback to the government on their time at university.

- Info available to applicants through UCAS website - feeds into league tables.

- However…we support students because we want to help them reach their potential…
The Business Case

- University funded on the number of students enrolled. If we lose students between years then numbers drop and our income with it – income that pays our salaries!

- Formula for fees funding in each academic area, eg: each science student brings in £10k funding each year – and more from halls fees, spending on campus

- PASS is showing improved 1st year success (+9% in 4 years, has continued 2 years) and PASS Intervention saved £1.22m in funding in 4 years
Student Retention Data: Life Sciences 2004-10

Acknowledgements

My thanks to the following people:

**Life Sciences’ Personal Tutors:** for delivering PASS tutorials

**Bryony France:** Student Support Coordinator: first port of call for students with questions and problems

**Andrew Rendell:** For helping to produce the Study Skills materials

**Peter Grebenik:** Excel wizard, for providing me with amazing spreadsheets and unearthing student data

**Keith Cooper,** Director of Student Services: For support on the pastoral side of PASS; acting promptly with student referrals

PASS Intervention was funded by Brookes Student Learning Experience Strategy, now funded by the School of Life Sciences HEFCE/Paul Hamlyn Foundation for funding ‘What works?’ project
References


