

Personal Tutoring Enhancement Projects 2009-10

Sharing Practice Event
30th June 2010



Education Enhancement

Biosciences

Project leader: Dr Nicky King

Other members of the project team: Dr Andy Pye

Title of project:

Enhancing Personal Development and Employability in Biosciences through Personal Tutoring

Overarching aims:

The project aims to help students identify key skills they have picked up during their degree programme and give them confidence that these skills will increase their employability and help them 'sell themselves' on the job market. These skills will include both generic and subject specific attributes. Student and staff engagement with ePDP is poor, with neither feeling that the system is equipped for the specific skills gained/needed by Biosciences students. We aim to produce a bespoke skills record, based on similar examples at other Universities and in close consultation with students and professional bodies.

By getting students to do this working closely with personal tutors it will enable tutors to write better references and will also enable tutors to provide students with better advice and guidance when discussing career options.

Preliminary results and analysis

The first stage of the project was to survey the staff and students about the existing ePDP set up. The results of this backed up anecdotal feedback we had previously received about ePDP in Biosciences:

- Student Opinions
 - 17% use ePDP regularly
 - 44% signed up but never used it
 - 28% never used it
 - 11% never heard of it!
- Staff Opinions
 - In theory a good idea, practically difficult, too broad, reflects on experience not skills

We then set about producing a bespoke tool for PDP which specifically addressed the skills sought in Biosciences graduates, this was partially based on the RSC Undergraduate Skills Recordⁱ and comprised of a skills audit (attached) and target setting exercise to be revisited at various points during the students time as an undergraduate. The skills audit was piloted with level 2 students at the Streatham campus through a compulsory module BIO2071 in February. Students completed the skills audit and then discussed their strengths and weaknesses with their personal tutors before setting targets to achieve before their next PDP meeting, which took place in June. Students were also asked for their feedback on the skills audit and PDP process. Overall the audit was favourably received, the only criticism being that it was paper-based rather than online but it is currently being developed on ELE for next academic year.

- Biosciences Skills Audit – Student Opinions
 - 86% think PDP is valuable
 - 88% found skills audit useful
 - 100% felt their degree equipped them with necessary skills

The current first year have also now completed their first skills audit and target setting exercise and will revisit this in the spring.

One of the drivers behind the project was the low scores received by Biosciences in the NSS for questions relating to skills and employability. It is clear from initial analysis that the students do feel their degree equips them with the necessary skills for employment, they have however in the past been slow to recognise that. It is hoped that the new PDP/skills audit system will help improve both students employability and the school's NSS score in this area through helping the student identify and have confidence in their skills. However it is important to note that the effect on the NSS will not be seen until at least summer 2011 when the current second year are graduating, and more likely the following year when the current first year have been through the full PDP cycle.

Recommendations

The key recommendation from this project is that there is no 'one size fits all' solution to doing PDP, it is important to recognize the specific skills that students pick up in particular disciplines and to also give students a sense of ownership over PDP.

The skills audit and target setting template has been shown to be successful by the RSC and is similarly used on more vocational courses such as the PGCE. So far students in the School of Biosciences have responded positively to the resource produced and it is currently being prepared on ELE for October 2010.

The online system will provide a permanent electronic record of a students skills audit, targets and ambitions which can be revisited at regular intervals by the student and their personal tutor. The tutors will also be able to access these notes at any time to aid reference writing. In the event that staff leave, or students are transferred to a new personal tutor, their complete record can simply be transferred to the new member of staff to allow some continuity of experience for the students concerned.

The system on ELE will lend itself not just to PDP but also to online record keeping for all aspects of personal tutoring.

It is also important to note that a key to engagement with PDP is to engage the students from day 1 and make PDP a core part of their Exeter experience.

¹ <http://www.rsc.org/Education/HEstudents/usr/index.asp>

PDP – Identifying your skills, strengths and weaknesses

The first part of this task is a skill audit where you will assess how good you think you currently are at using a particular skill. The skills identified are those which employers are looking for in graduates from Biosciences and the development of these skills is part of your degree programme. Don't worry if you don't feel confident in many of these areas, the aim of this task is to help you pinpoint your areas of strength and weakness so that you can identify opportunities to improve these skills during the next two years. This should be completed before your meeting with your personal tutor.

Rate your ability to use the skill against the following scale:

1. I can use this skill very well
2. I can use this skill well but some improvements could be made
3. I need to improve this skill
4. I need to put in considerable work to develop this skill
5. I have not yet had the opportunity to develop this skill

		1	2	3	4	5
a) Planning and Organisation	Planning ahead and demonstrating good time management					
	Identifying targets in my course					
	Planning for practical and project work					
	Planning ahead for meetings with lecturers and/or project supervisors					
	Planning for the next stage of my career					
Evidence and examples						
b) Study Skills	Making, organising, storing and finding notes effectively					
	Using lecture time effectively					
	Making the most of group work, tutorials and practical work to support my understanding					
	Learning effectively, reflecting and evaluating my learning					
	Thinking critically and analytically evaluating arguments					
	Planning new tasks and assignments					
	Using good revision and examination techniques					
Evidence and examples						
c) Information Handling	Understanding safety and risk information in the lab (e.g. COSHH, GM and microbiological hazard data)					
	Analysing and evaluating experimental data & interpreting laboratory/field measurements and observations					
	Using knowledge in solving problems					
	Appreciating error, accuracy and precision in lab/field work					
	Using primary and secondary literature/information sources					
Evidence and examples						
d) Communication Skills	Asking for advice and help from a range of people, including knowing when and who to ask!					
	Presenting ideas coherently to a range of scientific and non-scientific audiences					
	Maintaining good lab/field notes					
	Providing written reports of my work on time					

	Planning and presenting and oral presentation with appropriate visual aids						
	Planning and presenting a poster						
Evidence and examples							
e) Working With Others	Working in groups e.g. contributing in labs, tutorials and workshops						
	Assuming a number of different roles within the group e.g. team leader, team player						
	Interacting with a range of people to obtain necessary information and assistance						
	Giving and accepting constructive criticism						
Evidence and examples							
f) Practical Skills	Maintaining awareness of specific hazards relating to the chemical/organism/lab/field						
	Carrying out appropriate risk assessments						
	Understanding the principles behind and processes involved in experiments						
	Observing, measuring and recording appropriate variables in order to collect the information required						
	Selecting and using the appropriate techniques and procedures for experimental work						
	Using a range of instrumental/survey techniques						
Evidence and examples							
g) Reflection and Independent Learning	Using feedback on work to reflect upon academic performance and progress						
	Reflecting upon and planning for future skills requirements						
	Identifying and creating new learning opportunities, drawing on experiences within and outside my course						
	Maintaining an interest in general science issues						
	Understanding the independent learning requirements of my modules						
	Appreciating the way in which modules build on previous ones and in which the complement each other						
	Appreciating the significance of the material beyond the module in which it is contained						
Evidence and examples							
h) IT Skills	Using the VLE						
	Using electronic information sources e.g. the library, Web of Science						
	Word process scientific reports effectively						
	Using of IT to aid statistical analysis						
	Using IT to prepare effective presentations						
Evidence and examples							
i) Problem Solving	Applying acquired knowledge and understanding to the solution of biological and chemical related problems						
	Suggesting ideas/solutions in the absence of complete data						
	Working from first principles						
	Finding the appropriate information/knowledge/data to tackle an unfamiliar problem						
Evidence and examples							

What are your academic strengths? (In terms of subject areas/modules)

What are your academic strengths? (In terms of skills)

Now, working with your tutor you should identify areas for improvement and set SMART targets for both the short term (before your next PDP meeting in the summer) and longer term. All targets should be: **S**pecific **M**easurable **A**ttainable **R**elevant and **T**ime-bound.

Can you identify specific areas for improvement?

What targets can you set yourself?

- a) *In the short term i.e. before the next PDP tutor meeting*

- b) *In the longer term*

Students Signature.....Date.....

Staff Signature.....Date.....

Use this page to make note of any courses or work experience which you have undertaken which demonstrates any of the skills you have identified in the skills audit or which may help you identify and achieve in your future career. This information will help you build you CV and demonstrate relevant experiences to future employers.

Work Experience (paid or unpaid) e.g. summer work, internships, volunteering
Include details of role, responsibilities, type of work carried out and dates of employment

Non-academic qualifications e.g. Sports coaching, first aid etc
Include details of the qualification, in particular identifying specific skills you have developed through the qualification

Roles and responsibilities which have helped you develop your skills e.g. BioSoc committee, RAG committee, SSLC, Guide Leader, football team captain

There are a number of resources available to help you with PDP and to help you find out about opportunities to enhance you personal development and CV.
The University ePDP system is an alternative way of doing PDP, if you are completing the Biosciences PDP booklet you do not need to complete ePDP, however there are a number of resources attached to ePDP which you may find useful:
<http://as.exeter.ac.uk/support/development/taughtstudents/personaldevelopmentplanningpdp/resourcetohepyou/>
www.exeter.ac.uk/exeteraward - sign up to The Exeter Award for recognition of your extra-curricular activities
www.exeter.ac.uk/employability - the Careers Service website
and on WebCT look at the Biosciences Employability Gateway and the Academic Skills Module within 'All University - Gateways to Explore'

Sport & Health Sciences

Project leader: Richard Winsley

Other members of the project team: PG students – James Kelly, Marcella Hassova, Matthew Cuss, Amanda Dean and Lucy Nye

Title of project: **Embedding the ePDP in the Curriculum**

Overarching aims:

- To embed the ePDP within the undergraduate 1st year SHSS curriculum
 - Worth 10% of module grade in two modules
- To diversify the personal tutoring portfolio through using PG mentors

Preliminary results and analysis

- 95% engagement with the ePDP (n=213)
- Written feedback provided on personal statement and action plan twice during year in January and May
- Individual tutorials to discuss ePDP in Feb / March with mentors
 - Voluntary
 - Low uptake @ 10%
- Individual tutorials to discuss ePDP in June with personal tutors
 - Voluntary
 - Low uptake < 5%
- Focus groups for feedback with students + mentors

Recommendations

- Successful in increasing uptake and awareness of the ePDP but had limited impact on personal tutor engagement
- Personal Development Planning compulsory part of the first year experience
- Formal meeting with their personal tutor or other member of staff about their PDP
 - How can we guarantee student attendance, staff training, time load?
- Mentors
 - Ensure that mentors have done the ePDP themselves
 - Mentors should be involved for a number of cycles to build experience.
 - Driven by the mentors to increase exposure, build awareness?
- Reflective writing / thinking
 - Guidance lecture was given by EEU + marking criteria were given to students in advance
 - Students would like more help with this
- Mixed feelings about whether ePDP should be formally assessed
- Embed ePDP within a key skills / personal development / employability type module rather than “piggybacking” onto content modules
- To continue to raise awareness of skills development opportunities outside the School – from the Exeter Award to work-based modules provided by other Schools

Business School

Project leader: Juliette Stephenson

Other members of the project team: Jackie Bagnall

Title of project: **Evaluation of Personal Tutoring across the Business School**

Overarching aims: (1) To compare the personal development and personal tutoring provision across all year cohorts (UG) to evaluate differences between systems which have operated for each year group.

(2) In particular, to evaluate the new BSD1000 Personal and Professional Development module: in terms of how it has achieved its aims of encouraging students to take responsibility for their own personal and professional development and to evaluate the role of their personal tutors in facilitating this.

Preliminary results and analysis

Motivation: the Business School has been going through a 'step change' - in terms of the numbers of students including increasing numbers of international students – which has been strategically managed¹ by expanding the team of Teaching Fellows across all departments. Part of the role of TFs is to support students both pastorally and also with developing generic and specific skills; TFs are therefore taking responsibility for all the Personal Tutoring of UGs (which has previously been part of the role of research academic colleagues). This therefore has provided us with a real opportunity to address some of the issues around a somewhat piecemeal and variable PT experience that students were reporting.

The first team of TFs started in Sept 08; the first year UG intake was approx 500 and each PT was allocated up to a maximum of 96 personal tutees. Where possible students were allocated to TFs from the same department as their programme of study; each PT met with their tutees in groups on 5 occasions over the year with a programme of suggested topics and activities (including introducing them to ePDP). In addition there was a schedule of skills workshops (mostly provided by EE skills team) for students to voluntarily choose, plus employability sessions run by the BS Employability Officer and a variety of workshops for students who needed English language support run by INTO. At the end of the academic year we reviewed our provision and decided to 'roll' together all the above strands (skills, EAP etc) plus to timetable this provision. We therefore designed the BSD1000 (a non-credit rated module) to meet these needs.

From Sept 09 all first year UGs (approx 700) were assigned to a PT (including the second team of TFs) with BSD1000 on their timetable for 4 hours per week. There was a clear programme (see module handbook) for both semesters of PT meetings, face to face skills workshops, parallel on-line provision, a variety of language support plus employability sessions². This has been a 'pilot' project and the PT enhancement project has facilitated carrying out an extensive review of this and all other years.

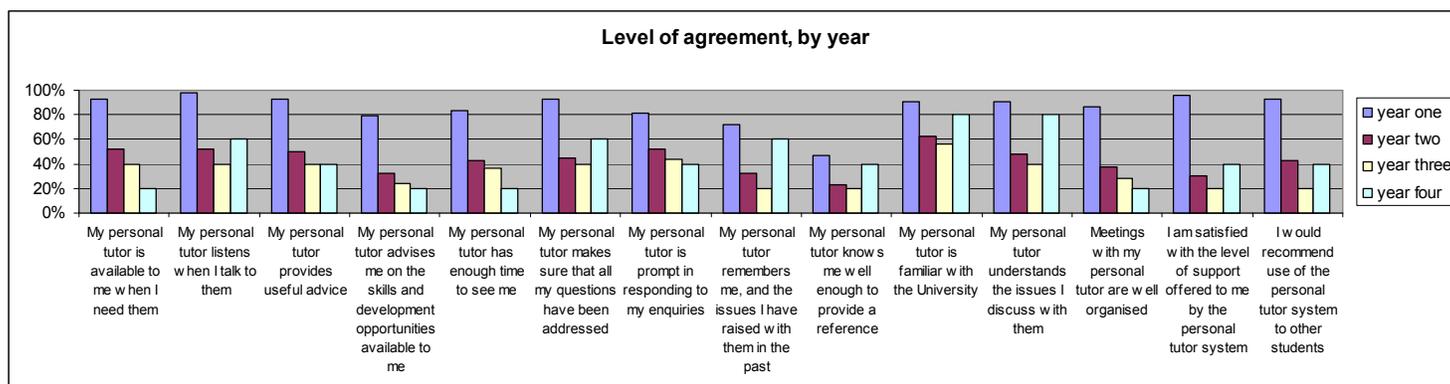
Preliminary results: feedback from the survey indicates that we have hugely improved our PT system. Overall satisfaction of first year students (in the 'good' + 'excellent' categories) is 75% (with only 7% not satisfied).

¹ One of several strategic measures.

² Part of greater provision offered across all years.

This is further emphasized in the bar chart below (NB the Yr 4 results are for only 4 WES students who have a completely different PT system).

In addition the majority of first year students are happy with the number of meetings with their PT over the year (with the position increasingly reversed for 2nd and 3rd students).



We have had a lot of positive feedback to our skills sessions but also with some useful suggestions for future improvements. Finally the survey included a general open question about personal tutoring and again there are some interesting responses to reflect upon; however the words of a 3rd year student sums up the importance of the changes we are making: *“I am not saying the personal tutoring system is bad but having not met my tutor, it was for me. I know I could have contacted them and should have been signing out with them at the end of term but when you’re in first year you have a lot going on so are not concerned with it. It’s only when you get to 2nd and 3rd year that academic life gets more important and you wish you had met them in 1st year. I think that an introductory meeting with your personal tutor should be compulsory to all 1st years. At least if you had met them at the beginning you would feel confident in approaching them in later years when necessary. It would have been good to know my personal tutor well enough to get a reference. As it is I have no one to ask.”*

Our aim is that by 2011 no student will be in this position.

Recommendations

In addition to the student survey we have also run a feedback meeting with the whole TF team. A number of preliminary recommendations have come out of this; however we have now set up a small working group to consider all suggestions in detail and this is yet to report.

Recommendations include:

- Dedicated Personal Tutors who enjoy the role is regarded as absolutely essential. Student services have also observed how much more smoothly and easily communications can now be made over whole range of issues.
- Meeting with our personal tutees on a one-to-one basis as well as in groups. A number of PTs have done this and feel that although time consuming (with such large numbers) it is a very valuable experience for both tutee and tutor.
- Rooms must be more easily made available for PT meetings to take place. We now have some administration support which should make this easier. However the issue of TFs sharing offices makes this even more difficult and very strong feelings were expressed.
- Skills provision needs further consideration: revisiting on-line modules (contextualising?); differentiation of modules (and perhaps offering them to combined year groups); broadening our provision etc.

- Developing a 2nd and 3rd year framework (BSD2000/3000) to help consolidate our on-going PT system throughout the UG student experience.
- Claire Lavers (STF) further developing skills support for PG students (BSDM including contextualised on-line modules).

Psychology

Project leader: Louise Pendry

Other members of the project team: Chris Longman, Phil Robinson

Title of project: **Student Perspectives on Support for International Students**

Overarching aims: We've seen an increase in international students (IS), both UG and PG, over the past few years within Psychology. In 2001 we had 20 IS (EU and non-EU), for 2009 the figure is 75. In real terms, though, because overall student numbers have also grown significantly across this period, our International figures for psychology are actually quite modest. Indeed, as a proportion of overall numbers, we actually have a lower proportion of IS now than we had in 2006/7. The University's internationalisation strategy aims for 20-22% of students of international (i.e. non-EU) fee status by 2015. Currently, we have less than 6%, so we may be looking at a big recruitment drive at some point in the future.

IS greatly enhance the vibrancy and diversity of our University community, but are we doing all that we can to make their time with us in Psychology as enjoyable and beneficial as possible? The purpose of this project was to seek the opinions of our IS about how best to support them across their lifecycle as students here at Exeter, in line with the University's strategy to use students as agents of change. These views would then inform our future service provision.

We developed a survey that assessed IS' perceptions of personal tutorial provision. Students were approached via email, and to encourage participation, we offered a prize draw (Amazon vouchers). 24 IS (21 UG, 3 PG) completed the survey (response rate = 32%). 3 IS (drawn from the same sample) participated in the focus group which took place a few weeks after the survey.

Preliminary results and analysis: Survey

What IS would like to get from PTs in terms of support (compared to what they perceive is currently offered)

- Aspects that match what is currently provided: **Students see Academic support as most important (matches what is currently provided)**. Accommodation, finance and attendance are perceived as least important (matches what is currently provided).
- Aspects where there is a discrepancy: **Students say they want MORE on social integration**, LESS on availability of Uni support services and maybe slightly MORE on module choices and careers (though only modest shifts).

My personal tutor is... (accessible, friendly etc.)

- **We do very well on most pastoral aspects** (accessibility, friendliness, listening, advice, skills development, remembering who they are, understanding, being organised and overall satisfaction).
- **We need to do better on IS support aspects, INTO and their experience as an IS, especially in the first year, where scores for these are lowest.**

Preliminary results and analysis: Focus group

“A personal tutor for me is just like, he is like someone standing behind you and supporting you. You know that someone is behind you and supporting you: you are not alone. I have that feeling.”

NB – a group of very positive students who have clearly had very positive experiences with their personal tutors.

Provision for international issues within the existing PT system

These students were satisfied that, if issues associated with international status arose, they could ask their tutors for advice. Even if the tutor was not sure initially, together they would work out how to take things forward (e.g., via INTO). For these students, there was no perceived need for a separate international tutor at School level. The service their tutors provide suggests some very good practice exists within the school that needs disseminating:

- 1. Being aware of services available to international students (INTO)**
- 2. Being prepared to spend time on a ‘personal journey’ finding things out together if necessary**
- 3. Being accessible (via email, and then for one to one as required)**

It was however noted that not all international students have such a positive experience with their personal tutors (this is borne out by larger scale survey data). **It was felt that such an international tutor role would certainly benefit students who are struggling, especially if the international tutor took up issues that international students felt needed to be addressed (was responsive to their needs).**

Mixed groups?

Only a small n, but consensus that mixed groups (Home and International) best:

Recommendations

- PT may be new to them. Be sure to **set out in first meeting role of PT** – as outlined in PT pack – clarify what it does and does not cover
- Make sure **IS** know from the outset **the chain of command** – who they see if there is an issue, and what their roles are
- Use early session to explain **timetable and self-directed learning** as it will be new to them.
- **Importance of first one to one meeting** (big groups can be daunting).
- **Mixed groups** afford a chance to integrate
- **Website crucial:** Develop easily navigable web provision at discipline specific and University level **to supplement PT role**
- Disparity between survey and focus groups – **need to promote best PT practice and/or standardise service provision for IS...**
- **.1 FTE International tutor role (see Appendix I) to champion needs of IS, facilitate transition, brief PTs, be accessible for IS issues (referral by PT), sit on UGSSLC and UGTC, liaise with International Students’ Office in Student Services, as required.**

Appendix I

Job specification for International tutor in Psychology

Weighting: 0.1 (168 hours)

The International tutor would play an important role in ensuring our international students integrate well into the UK university system and are able to make the transition as smoothly as possible. To achieve this, the role would entail:

- meeting with some of the students even before they enter the School of Psychology (liaising with key personnel at INTO) to aid the transition.
- following from this, the co-delivery (in conjunction with INTO) of additional study skills classes once students are in the School, front-loaded in the first term to aid the transition from an overseas setting to a UK one (exact topics to be confirmed following focus group research, but likely to include: What is expected of students studying in the UK system? What are seminars? Essay and report writing, Group working/presentations, Plagiarism). These would be organised to complement INTO's own in-session classes (the International tutor would be responsible for the more bespoke sessions that relate to Psychology teaching).
- briefing personal tutors on the support systems in place to help international students
- maintaining good lines of communication between personal tutors and international tutor
- being available/accessible to act in a one to one capacity to deal with issues that may arise that personal tutors are not able to adequately address (either based on the student's own approach or if referred by a personal tutor who may think additional support is needed).
- Sitting on UGSSLC and UGTC.
- Liaising with International Students' Office in Student Services, as required.
- This role would cover all overseas students (those paying international fees and those paying EU fees) at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

Graduate School of Education

Project leader: Dr Rob Freathy

Other members of the project team: Dr Philip Robinson

Title of project:

Review & development of personal tutoring/mentoring on PGT programmes

Overarching aims:

The project seeks to evaluate personal tutoring and/or mentoring provision for students on Masters and Professional Doctoral programmes within the Graduate School of Education. The project will evaluate current practice within the School; survey best practice outside the School; implement new procedures for personal tutoring/mentoring; and undertake a preliminary evaluation of these new procedures. The project will address the challenge of providing a suitable personal tutoring/mentoring system for PGT students within a School that includes a complex mix of (i) home and international; (ii) full-time and part-time; and (iii) on-campus and distance learners. These challenges will be considered in relation to the frequency of meetings, the methods by which meetings occur, and the depth of engagement with personal and academic issues. Other issues to be considered include the difficulty of implementing School-wide procedures bearing in mind the quantity of, and qualitative differences between, PGT programmes within the School, and the possibility that the Schools may be imminently subsumed into a larger College.

Preliminary results and analysis

While the majority of staff felt fairly clear about their role as personal tutors, several stated that there could be clearer and more easily accessible role-descriptors available within the School. It was felt that this would be particularly useful for newer staff members. Students responding to the survey were clear about who their personal tutor was, and what the relationship entailed, suggesting the information provided by the School is successful in reaching students, but also indicating the importance of the role to their educational experience.

Most students responding to the survey stated that they contacted their tutor in order to set up meetings, with the tutor contacting the student in a smaller number of cases. It is of course somewhat difficult to 'call' a student to voluntary meetings customarily necessitated by immediate student needs. Even so, some form of regularly initiated contact may be appropriate; students in focus groups stated that they would welcome occasional 'check-up' contact from tutors.

GSE as a whole keeps an informal 'open door' policy, and staff felt that they did a good job of being available to students. This was in part confirmed by the survey, where a majority of students felt that their tutors were prompt in responding to queries, and were available when needed. However, many students did also feel that their tutors didn't have enough time to address their queries in meetings. Following this up in focus groups, the students interviewed stated that this was not just a question of the duration of tutorial meetings, but of the structure and content. Students wanted more time to discuss individual issues, and wanted to feel able to do so in private one-to-one sessions if necessary. Students felt that group sessions, which often had a 'theme' or set topic, limited their time to access the personal tutor for other issues.

Attendance is currently monitored in different ways, and to different extents, across the School – this may be something that could be tied up by the Student Information Office. As far as tutorial meetings are concerned, it is hard to measure whether non-attendance is followed up, especially as there is currently no formal guidance for what entails ‘unsatisfactory’ attendance at these sessions. Again, students commented that more regular contact from the tutor might be helpful here, and that currently it did not necessarily ‘matter’ if a session was missed.

Most staff interviewed did not keep formal or standardised records of meetings (and indeed, one interviewee raised valid concerns over the status of any such documentation in relation to Freedom of Information). However, many staff members stated that informal records were kept, or ‘email trails’ referred to. Such records would not normally be centrally held, nor would they be available to students. In focus groups, students commented that it might be helpful to have a brief running record of decisions taken in meetings, but felt that this was not necessarily appropriate for all students, and that it ran the risk of overly formalizing the relationship.

Staff did agree that the writing of references was an important, if often time-consuming, part of the tutorial role. However, response from students, both to the survey and in focus groups, indicated that this was a key area of concern. Students felt that staff did not know them well enough to be able to write a full and complete reference. It seems likely that this does not necessarily reflect an actual lack of knowledge of students on the part of staff, but rather a perception that could be changed. In focus groups, students commented that they would not necessarily think to approach the personal tutor for a reference, simply because a rapport had not been developed.

In the recent survey of taught postgraduate students, respondents drew attention to a number of key areas in which they required support. While the personal tutor was perceived as being generally friendly, approachable, and knowledgeable about the University, the relationship appeared to falter when dealing with specific issues. These issues included personal development planning, skills development, and employability. In a further section of the survey, students highlighted study skills, research methodologies, and personal development planning as areas in which they required a ‘little more support’. Careers guidance and employability were perceived as being more important, and requiring more support, while academic study as a whole emerged as by far the highest pressure on students. Personal tutors need to be able to do more to support their personal tutees in these areas.

In terms of the structure of meetings, respondents to the student survey expressed a clear preference for a mixture of group and individual meetings, and this preference was regardless of their current meeting type. In focus groups, students noted that group meetings gave them a chance to interact with other students and build a sense of community (an ideal to which many of the staff interviews also referred), while individual meetings, where these were had, could be used to discuss more private issues specific to the student. These issues, mainly relating to careers and academic progress, corresponded closely to those already highlighted in the survey. Additionally, and importantly, students felt that more regular individual meetings might help to generate a feeling of pastoral support and care. Many stated that they found the personal tutor relationship to be quite an artificial one, but that a more natural relationship tended to develop where members of staff were met in regular individual meetings (for example with doctoral supervisors).

Recommendations

Accepting that there is an identified need to provide further academic and careers-related support to students through the personal tutor system, there seem to be two obvious available options. The first (and, given other constraints, least achievable) is to simply increase the amount of time personal tutors spend with students. The second is to adopt changes to the structure and content of tutoring sessions, allowing personal tutors to concentrate their time on key areas. This option would in turn necessitate the 'outsourcing' of other issues and information currently being covered in tutorial sessions. One way this could be achieved is to bring in administrative and professional services already in place within the School, and unite them more closely with the personal tutor system. Developing the role of the Student Information Office, for example, would appear to be a useful means of providing central support for students seeking administrative assistance, and freeing staff time to deal with more specialised issues. This is also in line with College and University-wide policy concerning the need to 'professionalize' roles in order to free up academic time.

Following from this, the timing and structuring of tutorial sessions could be arranged to be more in line with individual student needs. More consultation between individual tutors and individual students would seem appropriate, given the range of contexts from which GSE's current student intake is drawn. The School might facilitate this consultation with due consideration to staff and student timetables. Discussion of each student's requirements and aims, followed by some agreement or compromise concerning how the personal tutorial relationship might help the students achieve those aims, seems both a reasonable and an achievable goal. Some form of recorded documentation might help in this working process. Additionally, 'check up' contact from the personal tutor would be perceived by students as helpful, and indicative of a supportive educational environment. This would also appear to require relatively little time investment on the part of the personal tutor (though the amount of time required is, admittedly, highly dependant on the individual students involved).

Finally, as at least some of the basic employability and academic issues would be similar for students across the School, GSE might consider offering more School-wide workshops or discussion groups on the St. Luke's Campus. Again, this could potentially economise on the use of staff time, and, depending on the nature of the sessions and any follow-up activity arranged, this could also help foster a sense of wider community amongst GSE's postgraduate population as a whole. However, the nature, scope, and delivery of such sessions would require some careful thought, given the previously noted diversity of students enrolled in the School, and their often limited availability during working hours.

Engineering, Maths and Physical Sciences

Project leaders: Dr Neil Sewell and Jane Rowe

Other members of the project team: Trevor Bailey, Andrew Gilbert, Barrie Cooper

Title of project:

Evaluation of personal tutoring and PDP practices in CEMPS

Overarching aims:

As one of the first of the Colleges to come into existence, CEMPS was in a unique position last year of needing to look at the variety of systems and practices associated with personal tutoring, and in some areas, the link with academic tutoring and the curriculum.

During 2008-09, Engineering and Maths had re-launched its tutor system as a 'Personal Development Tutorial Scheme'. The aim was to make more explicit to staff and students the *developmental* as well as *pastoral* role of the tutor and to develop greater consistency in personal tutoring by raising awareness of minimum standards. The initiative was complemented by:

- a series of staff development sessions, delivered and coordinated by Education Enhancement, on topics such as 'The Role of the Personal Tutor', 'Personal Development Planning', 'Supporting Students in Difficulty' and 'Supporting International Students';
- creation of a College-based version of the University-wide 'Personal Tutor Manual' and other related resources;
- a published schedule of meetings arranged throughout a student's programme, focussed on particular themes, and with checklists of suggested questions to focus on. Tutors were asked to complete a tutorial record sheet for each student.

Physics has a traditional Oxbridge model of tutoring, with weekly small group, academic tutorials complemented by progress tutorials at the end of each semester. The latter have a personal development focus, and students are required to complete a PDP in order to prepare for these meetings.

In CSM, whilst there is a well-established personal tutor system, PDP is also well embedded in key modules such as Professional Development and IT . Support is further re-inforced by an academic role as 'Student Experience Coordinator', similar to that of a Senior Tutor.

The project presented the College with an opportunity to evaluate the student and staff experience of personal tutoring and PDP across the different areas of the College, and in particular to measure the effectiveness of the PDT Scheme in Engineering and Maths.

Preliminary results and analysis

A variety of research methods were used in conducting the evaluation: an online survey and focus groups for students; and semi-structured interviews for staff. There is a huge amount of data available from the survey, but the most significant results indicate that:

- In the student survey, *general* levels of satisfaction with personal tutoring were almost exactly the same in Maths and Physics, with Physics students apparently finding the most value from discussions about their *personal development*.
- A significant majority – 61% - of Maths students agreed that their tutor had advised them on the skills and development opportunities available to them. Interestingly, a higher proportion than in Physics either strongly or partially agreed that they had been encouraged to *reflect* on their academic, personal and career development as part of the personal tutor relationship.
- Despite the above, in Physics the overwhelming majority agreed that they valued discussing their personal development with their tutor, and in Maths a higher proportion also agreed than disagreed with this statement. In Engineering, though, students appeared not to find these discussions valuable. It would be a mistake to automatically interpret this as a lack of care and attention to students' personal development, as of all the subject areas investigated it is in CSM and Engineering that PDP is most firmly embedded in programmes. In focus groups, though, students spoke about the need to 'bring together' the formal CPD aspects of project work, for example, with the more personal context offered by 1:1 tutorials.
- It was also the Engineering students who felt least 'known' to their tutor, who did not feel the personal tutor role had been clearly communicated to them, and were most doubtful as to whether the personal tutor would be able to provide a reference for them. In the staff interviews, Maths, CSM and Physics tutors specifically mentioned reference writing as an aspect of their tutoring role, and in CSM the employability aspect was very visible, with tutors also providing advice on CVs and placements.
- The tutors interviewed in Maths and Engineering were all positive about the impact of the PDT Scheme ('well organised', 'well planned') and appreciated the clarity provided by the training, handbook and checklists for personal tutors. This appeared to have had a positive effect on ensuring some level of consistency.
- Whilst all the tutors interviewed clearly encouraged their students to reflect on their employability, and the value of PDP as a process was recognized: 'PDP can be used to drive, to push people into thinking about work placements and applying for them' (Physics tutor), not all of them were positive about the ePDP resource, finding it 'too touchy-feely', 'unstructured' or 'not the same, less full or honest, than what they would tell you in person'. Physics tutors in particular commented that ePDP is too generic to be a standalone resource and needed contextualizing for the students. Focused questions had now been provided that were relevant to their subject context and would hopefully result in better uptake next year.

It is clear from this project that, in a large and diverse college such as CEMPS, a 'one size fits all' solution may not be appropriate. Students' experience of tutoring – particularly as regards their personal development – cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader experience they have of their programmes and of the academic and professional community of the College.

The project has yielded an enormous amount of data – in particular about the relationship between tutoring and students' personal development, but also about the particular issues students face in the different subject areas. The next stage is to analyse the full range of results in more detail, and to use such data to inform discussions about best practice, perhaps at one of the College's Education Forum meetings.

Recommendations

- Project results to be used to inform further discussions about best practice, eg through College Education Forum and/or Education Executive Group.
- Teaching arrangements to be reviewed so as to facilitate smaller group sizes in some areas of the College and explore potential for linking some academic teaching to personal tutor group tutorials, even if only in the first year to build rapport.
- Set of 'focussed learner questions' to be devised and – where appropriate – customized at School level for use in PDP discussions. This might also include a list of examples of the kinds of experiences students should be recording in their ePDP records.
- In Engineering, explore the role of the log book and other professional development activities in relation to the developmental role of the tutor. Students felt that they were actively engaged in recording CPD opportunities linked to professional requirements in their second and third years. However, they suggested that the log book, or something like it, might be used in a more comprehensive way – as a basis for PDP discussions with the tutor.
- Continue to support staff development for new personal tutors – collaborate with EEU to make these more 'college specific'?

Continue to update resources for personal tutors, but explore alternative ways of making these available to staff.

Arts, Languages and Literature

Project leader: Andrew McRae

Other members of the project team: Sam Goodman, Symmonie Preston, Lauren Shepherd

Title of project: **Postgraduate Mentoring Scheme**

Overarching aims: This project aimed to explore the use of PG students as mentors, either for other PGs or for UGs. It took as a basis an established programme in Drama, and explored ways of replicating aspects of this programme for other departments in SALL (i.e. English, Modern Languages). Since each programme assumed a distinct form, this report is divided into two sections.

I. Drama Postgraduate Mentoring Scheme (Symmonie Preston and Lauren Shepherd)

Aims

To link postgraduate students with undergraduates for peer mentoring and scholastic advice. In past years we have had one on one sessions, and coffee afternoons where UGs can just ask questions to PGs; this has built up into PGs formally giving workshops and seminars in areas of interest to UGs. In the 2009-10 year, the bulk of workshop-style mentoring was moved to third term to provide activity and learning for the UGs during a time of no classes. As a result, workshops were well attended. In Drama the PGs who mentor are usually professionals in their field, which makes this a great networking opportunity for the UGs in the department. All workshops are geared to set students up for life post-UG degree, and get them on the right footing for pursuing their careers.

Preliminary results and analysis

Workshops were offered in a variety of genres: circus, stage combat, alba emoting, auditioning technique, auditioning classical/contemporary, long form improvisation, pursuing a PGCE, starting your own company, money/time management etc. Professional certified teachers were brought in for some sessions in order to insure safety whilst meeting the needs of the students. Private mentoring was still offered in terms 1 & 2, geared towards 2nd and 3rd year UGs who were applying for drama school to prepare them for their interviews and auditions. Private mentoring was also offered to students wishing to pursue further education, with special attention given to formal applications for postgraduate study. All students who were mentored through this PG mentoring programme who auditioned for drama school were offered a place at drama school for the 2010-11 scholastic year. All students who received mentoring for postgraduate education/PGCE continuing education applications were offered a place at their chosen institution.

Recommendations

The Department of Drama's PG Mentoring Scheme would like to suggest that the staff play a greater role in liaising with the PGs to foster a relationship between PG & UG students. This year the PG leaders of this project, who were MFAs not PhDs (as is usually the case), were left to their own devices and felt quite disconnected (and were almost interrogated as to their qualifications during the one staff meeting they were invited to). Given the value of this scheme to the department, especially in third term, staff members might thus do more to ensure its continuation. Perhaps the assignment of one staff member to sit on the scheme as a formal liaison would help. Secondly, we also want to foster an interdisciplinary relationship as we move into the College of Humanities: where, ideally, any Humanities student can take

part in the workshop if they correctly reserve a position on the online booking system. Thirdly, this greater staff liaison and interdisciplinary track could prove useful in finding a successor for the programme's leaders who will be finishing this term. This has been difficult, since the programme is more well known with undergraduates than postgraduates.

2. English/Modern Languages Postgraduate Mentoring Scheme (Sam Goodman)

Aims:

The main aim of the PGMS project in English/ML was to cover an identified gap in the provision of skills training and continuous professional development for postgraduate students; whilst all new PhD students have access to the Effective Researcher Development Programme (ERDP), MA students do not. The PGMS project intended to rectify this shortfall by providing informative/discursive workshops on specific topics, as well as information on routes of progression and employment. The project was to be run by PGRs as a means of ensuring that the information provided accurately and honestly reflected the current postgraduate student experience.

The SALL PGMS sought to provide subject-specific and general support to new MA, MRes and first year PhD students across English and ML. It was also intended to provide a social angle. Throughout the year, the project has offered a variety of workshops, events and general support designed to help develop attendees' skills as postgraduate students and connect them with the wider academic community at Exeter University.

Preliminary results and analysis

All new MA/MRES/PhD students in English and Modern Languages were provided with a questionnaire contained within their departmental welcome pack. The questionnaire was followed up by a short explanation of the scheme during welcome talks for all courses. Also during this short talk the details of the first event, a social mixer held in the Senior Common Room in Queen's building a week later, were announced. This event was also utilised as a means of informally gauging the needs of the new intake in further detail.

Utilising the data gathered from questionnaires and verbally from the welcome mixer, a number of possible activities were proposed. The first skills session comprised an informative presentation on preparing work for publication by the PGR editor of *Critical Quarterly* and a presentation on using primary sources in postgraduate research. The event had 10 attendees from the MA/PhD cohort who participated enthusiastically by asking questions and providing feedback. The fact that the session was inadvertently scheduled at a time that clashed with two MA seminar groups, however, was unfortunate, and affected attendance.

In the second term, efforts to arrange a session for the large body of creative writing MA students eventually failed, since none of the current Creative Writing PhD students I felt either capable or confident to lead such a session. Whilst understandable, this reluctance to become involved in the PGMS severely undermined its effectiveness, and represents a significant challenge for the future.

The final event took place on 18 June and comprised a short session designed to set up a 'study-buddy' scheme for MA students writing their dissertations over the summer. The event, whilst not well-attended, was particularly useful to those students who came along. The attendees agreed that the study-buddy scheme was a good idea and thought that it could be implemented earlier in the year in future.

Recommendations

It was stated early in the planning of the PGMS that 2009-10 would act as a trial year for the project and a means of testing methods of provision. My experience this year has been particularly informative and has led me to make the following recommendations:

1. The scheme should be considered for implementation across the College of Humanities Graduate School. If this happens, it will be important to recruit volunteers from across the constituent departments, as early as possible.
 2. Volunteers should commit to the project for a substantial amount of time or take responsibility for the organisation of one event across the year. This would then help to evenly distribute the workload and potential disruption to study.
 3. The PGMS team need to be provided with timetables for all MA courses at the earliest opportunity. This will aid scheduling and help ensure that events are as accessible as possible.
 4. PhD volunteers for workshops should be sourced in the first term, to aid planning throughout the year.
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