

University of Warwick – Review of Personal Tutoring 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 Background

- 1.1 The impetus for the Review of Personal Tutoring arose from informal feedback from Senior Tutors across the University, concerns raised by Heads of Department within the Faculty of Social Sciences, and from students via NSS and SSLC comments, which highlighted concerns about the effectiveness of existing personal tutor provision and the management of personal tutoring workloads.
- 1.2 Personal tutoring is the focus of current attention at a number of UK universities. The sector is seeking to ensure optimal provision relating to duty of care, student retention, student experience and academic progression in a climate where the learning environment and student support are of strategic importance. Whilst within departments across the University, there is some excellent personal tutoring practice, Academic Quality and Standards Committee (at a meeting held on 20 February 2017) approved an institutional review of personal tutoring. The review was timely given the University's recent commitment to personal tutoring development, via its investment in the Dean of Students' Office and the recent fractional appointments of the Dean of Students and three Faculty Senior Tutors.

2 Terms of Reference and Membership

- 2.1 AQSC mandated the Personal Tutoring Review Group to explore the purpose and requirements of personal tutoring and make recommendations to the University relating to future provision of personal tutoring that was 'fit for purpose', informed by best practice, demographic and diversity considerations, together with resourcing implications and timescales for implementation. It was noted that the interface between personal tutoring and wellbeing support should also be clarified as part of the review.
- 2.2 The Review Group included a carefully chosen external representative from King's College, academic colleagues from all Faculties, a SSLC Staff Co-ordinator, the Director of Wellbeing Support Services, a representative of the Students' Union Advice Centre; and both the current Education Sabbatical Officer and the Postgraduate Sabbatical Officer. The Group met four times, and comments on draft versions of the report were provided by correspondence.
- 2.3 The Review Group report will be received by the Faculty Education Committees and Faculty Boards in the Spring Term 2018, prior to consideration by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, the Senate and Council.

3. Considerations

In formulating its recommendations, the Personal Tutoring Review Group considered the following:

- 3.1 Findings from the previous institutional review of personal tutoring undertaken in 2011.
- 3.2 A literature review of relevant academic, practice and policy strands.
- 3.3 Consultation and discussion with relevant external parties as follows:

- (i) External Member of the Review Group (Dr Alison Stenton – King’s College)
 - (ii) UK Advising and Tutoring (UKAT) – UK professional body for personal tutoring in FE and HE in the UK.
 - (iii) HE providers (Appendix 2 of full report) - targeting institutions who have recently reviewed, or identified a need to review their personal tutor provision, or those identified as competitor institutions or leaders in the field of academic support provision.
- 3.5 Sector policy and regulatory framework.
- 3.6 Sector provision including purpose, models of provision, and benchmarks.
- 3.7 Interplay of Personal Tutoring with Wellbeing Support Services.
- 3.8 Training and support offered to Personal Tutors and Senior Tutors, and all materials on the Dean of Students’ website.
- 3.9 Information and views across the University through a number of strands of engagement including:
- (i) Consideration of available size and shape data.
 - (ii) Analysis of available NSS (quantitative and qualitative), PRES/PTES, size and shape data and ITLR insights as relevant to personal tutoring.
 - (iii) Chairs of all SSLCs (undergraduate and postgraduate) registered on the SU website were invited to discuss personal tutoring at a forthcoming meeting. A feedback form that used a Stop, Start, Continue framework was suggested to encourage critical and balanced consideration.
 - (iv) A web form on the Dean of Students’ website (http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/tutors/personal_tutoringreview/feedback/) inviting staff and student feedback and views, on current personal tutoring provision and its development. The form was signposted via Insite communications, an email to students from the SU, and a memorandum to all Heads of Departments and Departmental Administrators. Comments were collected Mar-Jul 2017.
 - (v) Interviews with Heads of Department (or designated representative for personal tutoring) and Senior Tutors to gather managerial/strategic views and operational/day-to-day insights respectively.

4. Findings

The breadth and depth of the work of the Review Group resulted in a number of rich findings, which were used to inform recommendations. Findings are extracted below, with page references to assist in cross-referencing against the full report.

Sector Findings

- 4.1 Policy and regulatory changes are increasing expectations around both the scope and quality of what we understand to fall within the remit of personal tutoring (p4).
- 4.2 Across the sector, the pastoral model of personal tutoring is most widely used. Variable quality of provision is a common feature across models, arising from tutor and institutional factors (p7).
- 4.3 Reshaping the pastoral model of personal tutoring to reflect a more proactive and developmental focus may improve tutoring effectiveness, peer-support and student

engagement (p7).

- 4.4 Sector benchmarks identify a need for clear guidance, role and boundary clarity, training, and compliance monitoring and review as underpinning the quality of personal tutoring provision, which best practice embeds within institutional Codes of Practice for personal tutoring (p8).
- 4.5 Widespread accounts of the negative impacts on tutors caused by role expansion, insufficient workload/time allocation and the complexity of students' issues are reported across the sector (p8).
- 4.6 Students prefer academic support to be provided by academic staff (p9).
- 4.7 Many HEPs use a Code of Practice to set out policy and practice around personal tutoring, embedding it within the teaching and learning space. Within this, compliance monitoring has begun to be viewed as a source of data analytics to inform further improvements (p11).

Institutional Findings

- 4.8 Significant increases in UG (including joint degrees) and total PG student numbers, and ongoing increases in student diversity and the intricacies of their needs intensify personal tutoring demand and complexity (p13).
- 4.9 Warwick largely operates a pastoral model of tutoring using a 'minimum requirements' approach, with no framework for regular compliance monitoring or regular review. The 'Minimum Requirements' are inconsistently applied and adhered to with local innovations giving rise to variable practices across departments (p15).
- 4.10 The proliferation of departmental support roles undertaken by academics e.g. DSEP, Director of Wellbeing, Director of Student Experience, risks a loss of clarity around the role and operation of the Senior Tutor role for both staff and students (p15).
- 4.11 Overall insights provided by the quantitative analysis are mixed, making it difficult to draw any clear and definitive conclusions about levels of satisfaction and optimum ratios for personal tutoring (p17).
- 4.12 There is a lack of centrally held quantitative data, or sector data specific to key aspects of personal tutoring - including tutor loading – which hamper evaluation of its provision and effectiveness (p18).
- 4.13 The bulk of students' dissatisfaction with personal tutoring relates to failings of its management and/or delivery rather than with the nature of the role itself. Many students report tutors' failure to deliver the personal tutoring service currently mandated by the University. Poor tutoring experiences adversely affect students' learning experiences and in some cases their sense of self (p21).
- 4.14 There is widespread student support for personal tutoring, particularly retaining the same tutor over time. More contact, structured discussions and training to assist tutors in handling routine and referral matters were common improvement suggestions. PG students highlighted a need for separation of the supervisory and personal tutor roles (p23).

- 4.15 Attaching monitoring points to meetings may cause a more instrumental engagement in some cases (p23).
- 4.16 Personal tutors provide an important first and ongoing point of contact for students, which connects students to their departments and enhances their learning experience (p25).
- 4.17 ITLR commendations for personal tutoring and a clear culture of support for students was evidenced across Faculties. Numerous pressures and potential threats to personal tutoring delivery were identified including issues around role boundaries, referral, workload, space, training, sufficiency of WSS provision (especially Mental Health provision) and PGR tutoring provision (p26).
- 4.18 Personal tutoring is recognised as of value across departments with a strong sense that it should be a shared academic responsibility (p27).
- 4.19 Perception of personal tutoring being regarded as low status work at the institutional and sometimes department level – as academically peripheral - attracting variable (sometimes no) workload recognition, and not directly contributing to career development, progression, promotion or other reward (p28).
- 4.20 Increases in Specific Learning Adjustments and Mitigating Circumstances, resulting in sharp increases in personal tutoring workload (p30).
- 4.21 Current referral mechanisms to Wellbeing Support Services (especially Mental Health) are not working effectively with some long wait times for students. This increases pressures on personal tutors left to manage students' difficulties within departments - exacerbating workload and stress particularly for Senior Tutors (p30).
- 4.22 Departments have resourcing issues, which compromises their ability to deliver effective personal tutoring (p30).
- 4.23 An absence of formalised and routine monitoring and review mechanisms leading to a lack of clear authority and responsibility for addressing performance (p30).
- 4.24 Overall staff dissatisfaction arises from the sense that they are called on to provide too much pastoral support at a level for which they are not qualified and that there are workload and workload recognition issues (p30).
- 4.25 Some broad agreement about the role and value of personal tutoring in relation to humanising students' experience and supporting their academic development and wellbeing, with a smaller number questioning whether it should be part of the academic role (p32).
- 4.26 Some fundamental concerns expressed about the current system's ability to cope with current demands and about the broader institutional framing of support tending towards a deficit rather than a developmental model (p32).
- 4.27 Ongoing review of the sufficiency, institutional approach to and model of student support and wellbeing within WSS may be timely (p35).
- 4.28 Many personal (and some senior) tutors are delivering personal tutoring without any tutoring training (p37).

4.29 The Dean of Students website is a key support resource for tutors, requiring redesign and development (p37).

5. Recommendations

5.1 The overarching recommendation of the review is to develop and implement an Institutional Code of Practice (CoP) for Personal Tutoring at Warwick (p39). Subsequent recommendations support and detail aspects of the CoP, and fall into four thematic areas as follows:

Resourcing: recommendations to secure resources that will allow the effective delivery of personal tutoring including workload, space, greater provision and embedding of Wellbeing Support Advisors into Faculties to support the referral process.

Recognition and reward: recommendations to develop institutional frameworks used to recognise and reward personal tutoring as one strand of academic performance.

Practice developments: recommendations to clarify roles and responsibilities; develop personal tutor training; and introduce student guidance.

Review: recommendations to support working towards the continuous development of the personal tutoring through an annual reporting process.

The recommendations of the Review Group are extracted below; in the full report, these are contextualised and expanded, so the relevant report page reference has been provided to assist with cross-referencing.

5.2 Institutional commitment to providing resources that enable Departments to deliver personal tutoring effectively, as set out in recommendations 3) workload credit allocation, 4) tutor ratios, 5) Wellbeing Support Advisors, and 6) office space (p41).

5.3 Departments be required to review and report to the Dean of Students' Office on how the work undertaken by Personal and Senior Tutors is recognised in departmental workload credit allocation. The Dean of Students to subsequently consult and recommend to University Education Committee how explicit and representative workload credit be attached to personal tutoring more consistently across the University (p42).

5.4 Agree a limit of 25 tutees per tutor and to achieve this, departments be required to allocate personal tutoring workload across all available members of academic staff. Where this limit is exceeded, departments be required to explain the reasons for this and how the quality of personal tutoring provision and wellbeing of tutors is ensured (p42).

5.5 Increase the number of Faculty-embedded Wellbeing Support Advisors to provide more efficient student referral by Personal and Senior Tutors, with ongoing review of WSS sufficiency (p43).

5.6 University work towards providing individual office space for all staff with personal tutoring responsibilities. Where shared offices are used, the University identify private meeting room spaces within each Faculty, bookable by Departmental Personal Tutors, to enable tutor-tutee meetings to take place (p43).

- 5.7 Criteria identified within existing institutional frameworks used to recognise and reward academic performance (e.g. PDR, promotion and merit pay criteria) – be amended to explicitly include personal tutoring performance (excellence) as one aspect to be considered (p43).
- 5.8 Introduce a Personal Tutoring award, as a separate strand of the Warwick WATE awards (p43).
- 5.9 Faculty Senior Tutors explore with Departments integration of group tutorial programmes within their personal tutoring provision for all first year UG and PGT students (p44).
- 5.10 Amend the Graduate School's guidance, to include a requirement that departments clearly communicate existing personal tutoring arrangements for all PG students and, as part of this, nominate a member of staff, outside of the supervisory arrangements, as a personal tutor for any PGR student requiring support outside of the supervisory relationship. (p45).
- 5.11 Where monitoring points are considered problematic in the tutoring encounter, departments consider reframing them as structured engagement points for students with personal tutorials (p46).
- 5.12 Amend the Role/Responsibility Specifications (previously agreed by Senate in 2012) for Personal and Senior Tutors and approve that for Faculty Senior Tutors as set out in full report (p46).
- 5.13 Approve the development and implementation of Personal Tutor Basic Training, compulsory for all new members of staff who have, or are likely to have, personal tutoring responsibilities – undertaken within the first year of their appointment (p48).
- 5.14 Approve the development and implementation of Personal Tutor Refresh Training, compulsory for all existing members of staff with personal tutoring responsibilities – undertaken once every three years (p49).
- 5.15 Approve the development and implementation of compulsory Senior Tutor Training (to be undertaken within the first year of appointment to the role) and a requirement to undertake the following one-off training elements:
 1. Online CWMT training.
 2. Mental Health Awareness – ½-day one-off session (p50).
- 5.16 Redesign of the Dean of Students website with technical resource provided to achieve this (p51).
- 5.17 Develop a Personal Tutee Guidebook for Students (p51).
- 5.18 Introduce an Annual Report and Compliance Monitoring for Personal Tutoring and seek to embed this within the appropriate existing institutional review framework. (p52).

Professor Louise Gracia
Dean of Students

Louise Hasler
Assistant Registrar (Teaching and Learning)