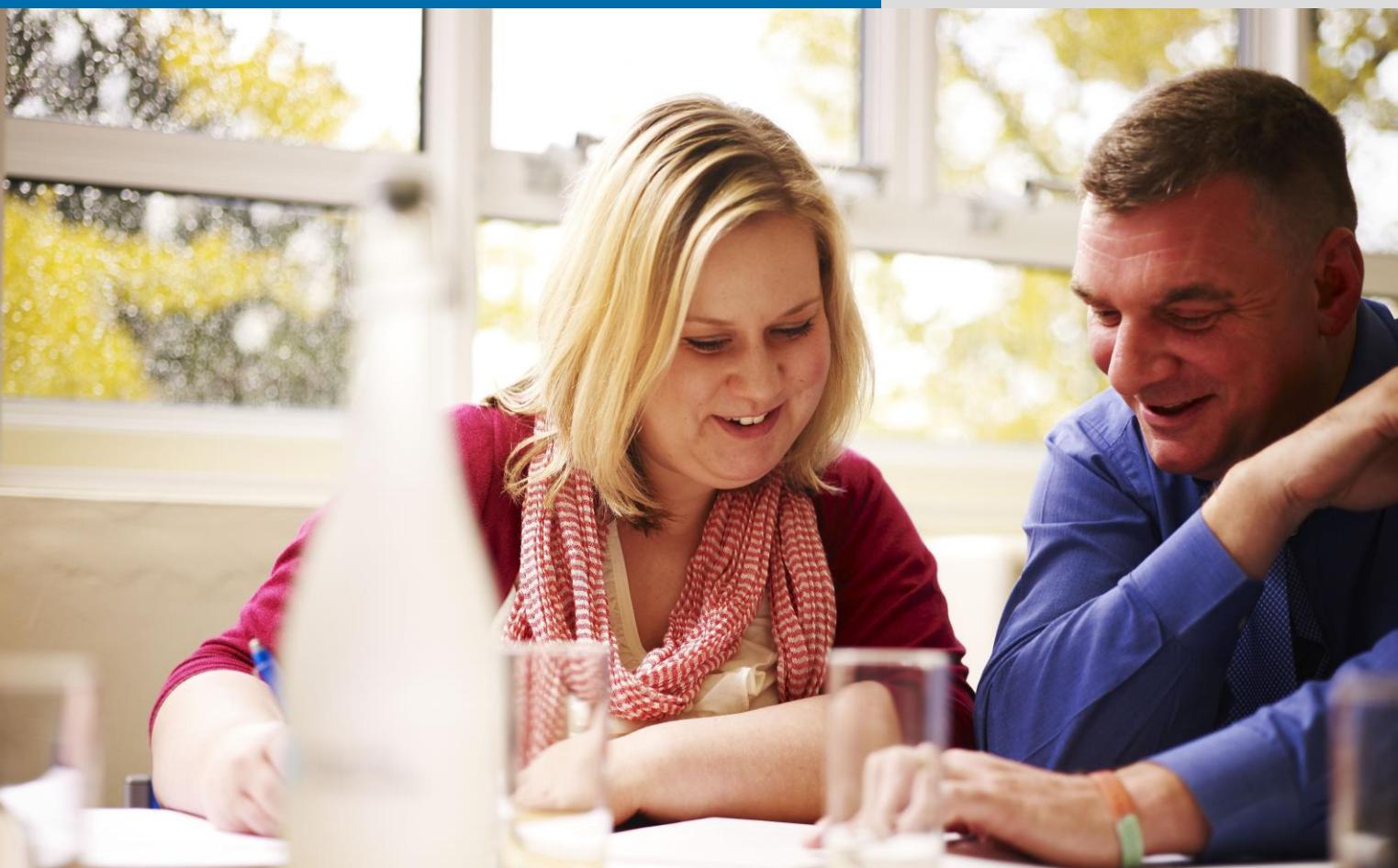


Personal Academic Tutoring



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Introduction

This document is designed to support academic staff undertaking the role of Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) at the University of Worcester.

All Personal Academic Tutors at Worcester have three basic roles:

- To support the holistic academic development and progress of tutees
- To act as the first point of call for tutees experiencing issues or problems
- To provide tutees' official University reference

These roles are a minimum expectation. The University policy explains that the focus of the PAT role is to support students in relation to their course and studies as follows:

- Support students in becoming a member of the University and making the **transition** to studying in, and between the different levels of, higher education

Help students to understand the **requirements** of their course in terms of knowledge and

understanding, skills development and assessment requirements

- Support students to **take responsibility** for their own learning through helping them to reflect on their progress, identify their learning needs and develop appropriate strategies to achieve them
- Help students to make the most of the **learning resources** and other forms of learning support available to them
- Support students in academic, professional and career related **planning and development**, and the appropriate recording of this
- Advise and guide students on **issues or problems** arising whilst they are at the University and, where appropriate, direct them to the broader range of services provided by the University
- Support students for whom there may be **particular challenges** when entering higher education.



The Framework for Personal Academic Tutoring

How are Personal Academic Tutors allocated?

All students are allocated a named Personal Academic Tutor from their course or subject on entry to the University. Undergraduate students will normally have the same PAT for the duration of their studies, although subjects may decide that Personal Academic Tutoring in the final year of an Honours degree is best supported through the Independent Study or Major Project supervisor. Joint Honours students will be allocated a PAT for one of their subjects and given a named contact to facilitate access to academic support for the other subject. Post-graduate students will also be allocated a PAT; in some cases, this may be the course leader.

How often do meetings take place?

- There is an initial meeting, normally during Welcome Week for Undergraduate students, or within the first three weeks of the start of the academic year for all other students
- A series of planned one-to-one or group sessions (group sizes may vary depending on course and curriculum needs) for tutees
- There are a minimum of four meetings during the academic year for all first year undergraduate students, three meetings in the second and third years of study, and a minimum of two meetings for post-graduate students
- Meetings are timed to coincide with key points, such as induction/transition, assessment results or module selection
- Personal Academic Tutors will make tutees aware of when they are available and how to arrange a meeting outside of scheduled PAT meetings.

Personal Academic Tutoring should consist of a **planned and scheduled** set of meetings with **clear**

purposes, activities and outcomes, to reflect the focus of the system. The course approach to PAT should be communicated and explained to students at the start of the year.

What form should the meetings take?

The aim is that all courses will be able to schedule at least two meetings on a one-to-one basis; however, there is some flexibility, so that it may be appropriate to consider a mix of group and individual tutorials.

There are occasions when having a group meeting may be valuable, depending on the purpose or focus of the meeting. For example, if the information being discussed is the same for all students, e.g. explaining the Personal Academic Tutor role or facilitating student academic development activity, it may help students to discuss these matters with other members of the group. For this reason, it may be appropriate for the initial meeting to be undertaken as a group, to help the tutees make friends and establish peer support. The Personal Academic Tutor group may be the only one constant group to which a student belongs throughout their University career. It therefore has the potential to establish a sense of belonging to the University and provide a stable network of peer support.

Other meetings are best held with individuals, where the information will be different for each student or confidential to them, e.g. when discussing module choices, assessment feedback or personal issues. If the PAT is approached by a student experiencing difficulties, it is important that the meeting be held in a private environment.

Models of tutoring

Students are encouraged to see their PAT as their first point of contact to discuss any wider issues or problems that arise during their time at university. It is not the role of the PAT themselves to try to resolve the issues raised, but rather to listen, offer initial advice and then, as appropriate, direct the student to other suitable sources of help including the broad range of services available within the University.

Sometimes, just having a representative of the University listen to a tutee's issues is enough. **Encouraging students to find their own solutions** rather than stepping in to provide answers is a useful strategy.

This might involve moving away from a **directive style** (where a tutor might give instructions and tell the student what to do) towards a **non-directive style** (where a tutor actively listens, asks open questions, summarises and reflects on what has been discussed).

The GROW model (see fig. 1) offers a simple way of structuring a discussion and guiding the student through to their own possible actions and resolution:

- **Goals** – Encourage the student to define their issue and to establish what their goals are in terms of addressing it
- **Reality** – Let the student tell their story, prompt thinking about where they are and

help them to become more aware of their situation and their own role in it

- **Options** – Help the student to define possible options available to address the situation
- **Way Forward** – Work to establish a commitment to changing the situation and a way forward to achieving their goals. Clarify responsibilities for any actions.

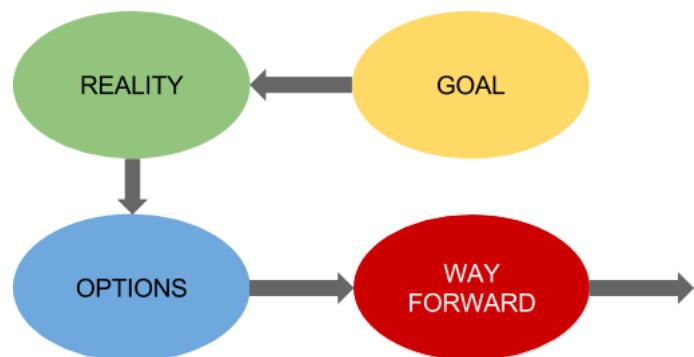


Figure 1 - The GROW Model

It can be helpful to encourage students to set SMART goals: **Specific, Measureable, Action-oriented, Realistic and Time-constrained**.

A useful approach is **Personal Development Planning** (PDP); this is an iterative process of self-reflection, recording and action that encourages students to focus on their self-development and to plan for the future (see fig. 2).

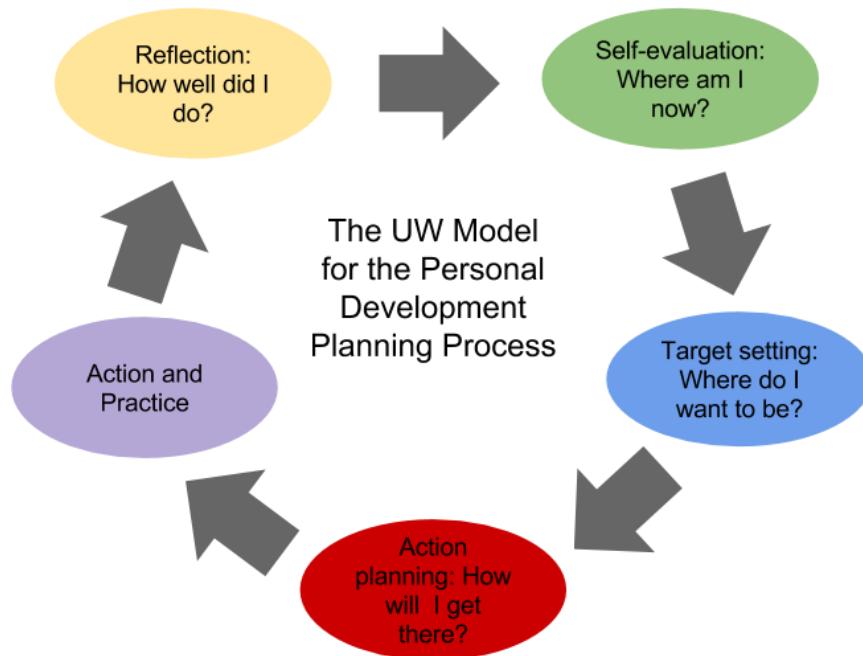


Figure 2 – The UW model for PDP

Keeping a record

The record

Tutorial records can be kept in various forms. Where good practice has been identified, examples of effective methods of record keeping have included a **course booklet** that students bring to every tutorial meeting with a copy of key pages kept by the tutor, or a **spreadsheet**, which is visible to both tutors and individual tutees.

Examples of information stored in these records could include:

- Tutorial and course attendance in general
- Tutorial agendas
- Course achievements (module grades etc.)
- Extra-curricular awards gained
- Vocational Experience (organisation, position/role & duties undertaken)
- Placement mentor reports and tutor observations of practice (if appropriate)
- Details of Worcester Awards
- Progression details
- Reflection on achievements and future strategic action
- Goal setting

Some courses already have **tutorial record sheets** as part of their formative assessment process and others may be developing them as part of the embedding of Personal Academic Tutorials into their student support strategy

Tutor

Personal Academic Tutors are expected to keep a **record of meetings** by annotating the tutee records via the staff SOLE pages. These provide space to record key points discussed and proposed actions, as well as any issues that may have arisen. These records provide useful information for future meetings and academic references. It is possible to mark notes of a meeting as sensitive and therefore only accessible to you.

Tutee

Preparation for meetings by tutees is considered good practice. For example, tutees could complete sections of booklets or forms prior to the tutorial meeting. Tutees are also be expected to maintain a **record of meetings**.

Referring students

There are a range of sources of advice, guidance and support for students provided by the University Student Services through [Firstpoint](#) (see fig. 3) and through the [Students' Union](#). PATs are **not expected to resolve all issues or problems presented by students**, but rather to listen, offer initial advice and then, where appropriate to direct the student to other appropriate sources of help available within the University.

When working with a student who is experiencing difficulties, tutors will need, at some point, to decide whether the student needs to be **referred** to more specialist services. If a tutor decides to do so, it is a good idea to remain in touch with the student to monitor progress. If there is uncertainty about whether to refer the student on, then confidential advice should be sought from Student Services. See the document [Helping students to access the right support at the right time](#). Students should be encouraged to take responsibility and make any appointment themselves if possible. Whilst tutors are not bound by any professional code of ethics (unlike for example, counsellors), students will nevertheless usually assume that their private conversations with tutors will remain private. Conversely, some students will assume that having told their PAT, they have therefore told the University. It is therefore vital to clarify this with the student and to secure the permission of the student before sensitive material is shared with

the wider University or any referral is made. If this permission is not forthcoming and the student cannot be persuaded to make their own approach for support, it is difficult to make progress; however, tutors can make an anonymous enquiry to Student Services for guidance if necessary.

There are guidelines that can make referral a positive action, one from which the student is more likely to benefit:

- Know the resources available to you in your institution, and how access can be made to them
- Check with the student whether or not they have seen anyone else
- Explain what other resources are available which you think could be helpful
- Explain why you are suggesting this. Be honest about your own limitations, and try to ensure that the student does not feel rejected by you
- Ask the student how they feel about referral, do they feel able to go and talk to someone else about this? What would help them to do that?
- Be aware of confidentiality, and don't release information without the student's express permission
- As a rule, it is better to enable the student to self-refer by giving them the tools to do it themselves – information about where, what, how etc.

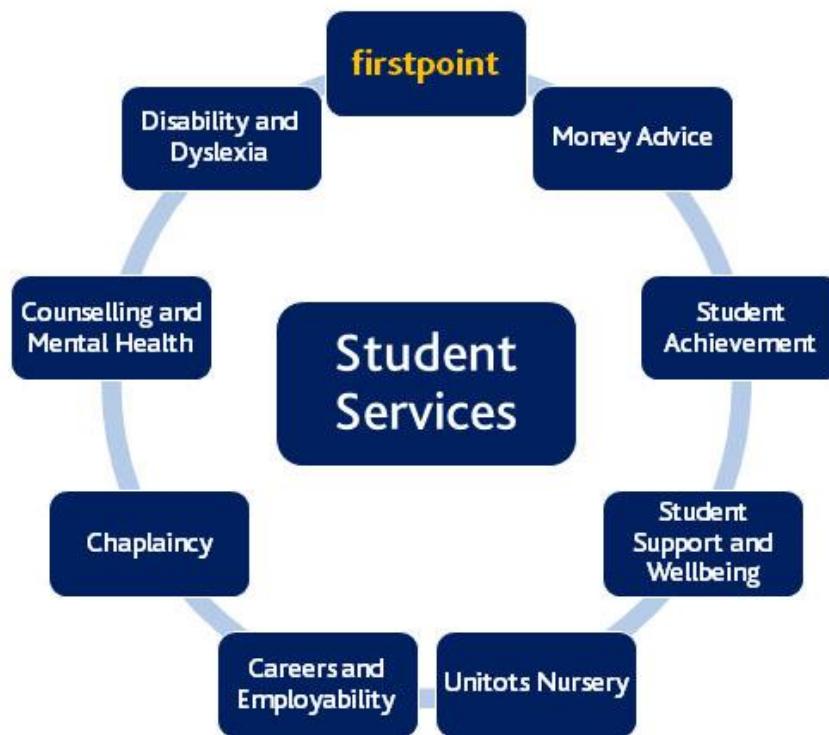
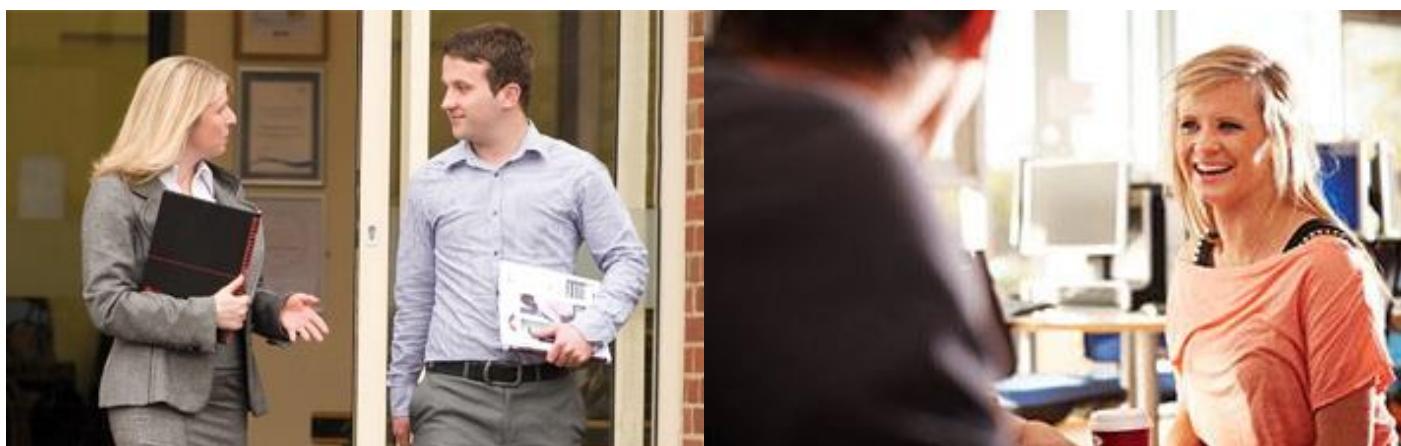


Figure 3 - Services provided by Student Services

The University Reference

Personal Academic Tutors are expected to write a University reference for the student when requested to do so, including for summer jobs, work experience or internships. It is, therefore, important to raise the subject of references with students throughout their programme of study and to maintain a dialogue with them about this. Students should be asked to keep

tutors informed and to provide them with an up-to-date CV or record of their achievements, together with details of the job application. It is important that the reference provided is fair, balanced, accurate and complete, so tutors should try to ensure they have all the relevant information available.



The initial PAT meeting for first year undergraduates

The first year is the most crucial in terms of supporting students making the transition into being a member of the University so it is important these meetings are well-thought out and purposeful. The timings of the meetings are indicative and built around the academic year but Institutes and programme teams may make their own arrangements to fit their own structures. There are exercises, self-audit tools, questionnaires and materials available to support many of the activities suggested here. For further guidance, see the resources section at end of this document.

Preparing for the first meeting

It is helpful for the student to have done some **preparatory work** for the first Personal Academic Tutor meeting and for the PAT to have had chance to look at this. An example of this might be a brief pre-entry or Welcome Week questionnaire about the student's expectations of the subject and study in HE and their confidence about their readiness for these.

The first meeting

This should take place during Welcome Week or, at the latest by week three of the new academic year. It is part of the induction process and could be timetabled into Welcome Week or a core module. There are arguments for this being either a group or an individual meeting, to either build peer relationships or establish an individual link with a tutor. The meeting needs to address **both academic and practical issues** about transition into Higher Education and becoming part of the University community. It might include the following:

- Introduce yourselves and say a little bit about your backgrounds and goals: what brings you here?
- Transition: what does the student expect will be different about study at University?
- Expectations: what is the student looking forward to or concerned about in terms of studying the discipline in HE? Belonging to the community: how are you settling in with the programme of study and with peers?
- Check on practicalities: are the student's timetable, accommodation and access to SOLE pages all OK?
- Sources of support: does the student know where to go for help for the Course, Registry, ILS and Student Services?
- Ground rules about Personal Academic Tutoring: discuss roles, the plan of future formal meetings, recording of meetings, how you each prefer to be contacted, booking additional tutorials, use of email and realistic expectations about the speed of response.



The initial PAT meeting for second year undergraduates

This section gives some brief ideas for what might be covered in the initial PAT meeting in the second year of a typical three-year degree programme. This is a crucial year, which lies at the heart of the undergraduate experience. It marks a transition onto modules where many results count towards the final degree and a period of preparation for final year independent research study or project work. It is often the year when students engage in some formal **work-related learning** and become more involved with **Students' Union activities**. There is plenty to discuss, so it is important that the personal academic tutorials remain purposeful and focused. The timings and nature of these meetings can be arranged in ways that make most sense for each particular Institute and course. There are exercises, self-audit tools, questionnaires and materials available to support many of the activities suggested here in the [Resources](#) section and further guidance is available from the Educational Development Unit.

[The second year: the first meeting - welcome and welcome back](#)

This should take place within the first few weeks of the new academic year. Tutors may find it useful to ask students to **prepare for this meeting** by looking back on their learning from last year and particularly at formal feedback received on their end of year assignments.

PAT meetings for third year undergraduates

[The third year: first and second meetings](#)

The following section gives some brief ideas for what might be covered in Personal Academic Tutor meetings in the final year of a typical three-year degree programme. This is a crucial year because it marks the culmination of undergraduate study. Results really matter in the final year and there will be much independent

[Reflecting back](#)

Tutors might ask themselves what were the key things they learnt last year about the subject, higher education or themselves. Are notes being kept of this learning?

[Self-evaluation and planning improvements](#)

Tutees should be asked were their marks last year what they expected? Are there any themes emerging from assessment feedback which need to be addressed? Do they have a clear idea about what and how to improve?

[Transitions and expectations](#)

Tutors might enquire whether tutees are feeling at home at University. How do they expect second year work to be different? What are their goals and plans for the second year and beyond?

[Opportunities](#)

Other questions for tutees might include whether they are involved in, or considering getting involved in, extra-curricular activity such as the [Students' Union](#), [Earn as You Learn](#) or [Volunteering](#). Are they aware of the learning from work opportunities available within and outside the course? In addition, the arrangements for other meetings during the year should be clarified.

research or project work to do. However, it is also a transition year, with plans being made for **progression after graduation**. For some, this will be a top-up year and special attention will be needed to help such students make the effective transition into degree-level study. Personal Academic Tutorials should both **support** the effective deployment of all that has been learned

so far and **prepare** students for moving on from University.

Welcome and welcome back

Transitions

Tutees should be asked how they did last year and whether they are prepared for the final year. Do they feel what they have learnt so far has equipped them for the third year of study? Are they comfortable in their abilities to conduct independent literature searches, project work and research? What approaches might be adopted and do they know where to get help if it is needed?

Support career planning

Further questions might include what tutees intend to do after completing their studies and what preparations they can make. For example, the support available from the course or the careers service in terms of interview technique, CV writing, making applications, etc. might be discussed. The drafting of a University reference and the importance of keeping the PAT informed of extra-curricular achievements should also be included.

Understanding the subject

Tutors might ask what the general ideas are that need to be grasped by tutees at this level of study.

The progress of the independent study or project work should also be checked. Tutees should be questioned about what they are learning from the third year of study and how this is being captured or recorded.

Third meeting:

Topics for discussion might include:

- **Subject Understanding**

Progress with independent study or project work. The learning from this and other specialist final year work.

- **Articulating achievement**

Tutees should be urged to consider whether they could explain what they have learnt and gained from their time at University in order to share the benefits of their University experience with others. Could they 'sell themselves' to an employer or admissions tutor for further study?

- **University reference**

Tutors should check the student has provided them with as much information as possible for references, particularly on extra-curricular activity. In addition, tutees should be advised to complete the Destination of Leavers survey following graduation.

Examples of good practice

A cross-University study undertaken by the Educational Development Unit during the 2016/17 academic year identified some key elements of good practice. In particular, the outcomes of both internal and national student surveys indicated there was a link between student satisfaction and the Institute's organisation of Academic Personal Tutoring. The findings from the study concurred well with those of other authors regarding the positive links between structuring and embedding PAT into the curriculum and the effective engagement of students (Stevenson, 2009, p.121; Bovill, Bulley and Morss, 2011, p.9). This is particularly important, as PAT has been cited as a

key component of student retention (Bowden, 2008, p.52; Thomas, 2012, p.43). The study found that:

- PAT works best when it is **embedded into the course curriculum** in ways in which it can be an essential and in some cases mandatory part of the academic experience. Effective practice was linked to having a planned schedule of meetings with clear purposes and values, particularly if related to assessment processes
- PAT is most effective when it is **actively managed at Institute level and owned and designed at course level** as part of a wider

- 'wrap-around' student experience. The roles and responsibilities of PATs should be included in staff induction processes and the system should be explained to students at Course level
- Successful examples of Personal Academic Tutoring feature the effective **tracking** of students, regular **goal and target setting**, and a built-in **personal development review** that is

systematically recorded in a document in hard-copy or electronic form

- Practice where engagement was strongest not only demonstrated approaches to tutoring that effectively supported students in terms of their personal, professional and academic development, but also addressed issues of diversity, equality and inclusion.

Resources

The following resources provide some useful information and research on issues related to Personal Academic Tutoring.

Online resources

Plymouth University (2013) *7 Steps to: Effective Personal Tutoring*. Available at:

<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/2/2403/7%20Steps%20to%20Effective%20Personal%20Tutoring%20%201.pdf> (Accessed: 18 April 2017).

Higher Education Academy / University of Manchester (2016) *Academic Advising for Employability Toolkit*. Available at:

<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/ee/manchester-hea.pdf> (Accessed: 18 April 2017).

Higher Education Academy (2015) *Video resources: What works? Student retention and success programme*. Available at:

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Centre for Recording Achievement (2017).

Tutoring. Available at:

<http://www.recordingachievement.org/higher-education/tutoring.html> (Accessed: 18 April 2017).

Tryfona, C., Tryfonas, T., Levy, J. and Hughes, N. (2013) Personal tutoring and key skills development in higher education – experiences and challenges. Available at:

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/gen_056_0.pdf (Accessed: 16 August 2016).

National Union of Students (2011) *NUS Charter on Personal Tutors*. Available at:

https://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/16326/cbd576a77489e6f3f8558bf914aadde8/PersTutCharter_web.pdf (Accessed: 18 April 2017).

National Union of Students (2012) *NUS Charter on Academic Support*. Available at:

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Jobs.ac.uk (2011) Teaching Skills: Academic Tutor - all-knowing guru or best mate? Available at:

<http://www.jobs.ac.uk/careers-advice/working-in-higher-education/1713/teaching-skills-academic-tutor-all-knowing-guru-or-best-mate> (Accessed: 18 April 2017).

The United Kingdom Advising and Tutoring group (2017) Available at: <http://www.ukat.uk/> (accessed: 18 April 2017)

Thomas, L. (2012) *Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: final report from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme*. Available at:

<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/what%20works%20final%20report.pdf> (Accessed 11 June 2016).

Books and Book Chapters

Laycock, M. (2009) *Personal Tutoring in Higher Education – Where Now and Where Next? A literature review and recommendations*. London: SEDA.

Thomas, L. and Hixenbaugh, P. (2006) *Personal Tutoring in Higher Education*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Wisker, G., Exley, K., Antoniou, M. and Ridley, P. (2007) *Working One-to-One with Students: Supervising, Coaching, Mentoring, and Personal Tutoring*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Neville, L. (2007) *The Personal Tutor's Handbook*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Articles

Braine, E. and Parnell, J. (2011) [Exploring student's perceptions and experience of personal tutors](#), *Nurse Education Today* 31(8), pp. 904–910. doi: 10.1016/j.nedt.2011.01.005.

Drake, J. (2011) ['The Role of Academic Advising in Student Retention and Persistence'](#), *About Campus*, 16(3), pp. 8-12. doi: 10.1002/abc.20062.

McFarlane, K. (2016) ['Tutoring the tutors: Supporting effective personal tutoring'](#), *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 17(1), pp. 1-12. doi: 10.1177/1469787415616720.

Myers, J. (2008) ['Is personal tutoring sustainable? Comparing the trajectory of the personal tutor with that of the residential warden'](#), *Teaching in Higher Education*, 13(5), pp. 607-611. doi: 10.1080/13562510802334988.

Owen, M. (2002) ['Sometimes You Feel You're in Niche Time: The Personal Tutor System, a Case Study'](#), *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 3(1), pp. 7 - 23. doi: 10.1177/1469787402003001002.

Riddell, C. and Bates, N. (2010) ['The role of the personal tutor in a curricular approach to Personal Development Planning'](#), *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, Special Edition.

Stephen, D., O'Connell, P. and Hall, M. (2008) ["Going the extra mile', 'fire-fighting', or laissez-](#)

[faire? Re-evaluating personal tutoring relationships within mass higher education'](#), *Teaching in Higher Education*, 13(4), pp. 449-460. doi: 10.1080/13562510802169749.

Watts, T. (2011) ['Supporting undergraduate nursing students through structured personal tutoring: Some reflections'](#), *Nurse Education Today*, 31(2), pp. 214-218. doi: 10.1016/j.nedt.2010.06.005.

Wilcox, P., Winn, S. and Fyvie Gauld, M. (2005) ['It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people': the role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education'](#), *Studies in Higher Education*, 30(6), pp. 707-722. doi: 10.1080/03075070500340036.

Guides and Toolkits

The following guides from other Universities provide useful hints and tips for Personal Academic Tutors at the University of Worcester.

[Personal Tutor's Toolkit](#) – Aston University

[Personal Academic Tutoring](#) – University of Northampton

[Personal and Academic Support for Students](#) – University of Sheffield

Resources for students

[University of Worcester - Study skills website](#)

[University of Worcester – Personal Academic Tutoring](#)

[University of Worcester - Re-assessment materials](#)

[LearnHigher - Learner development resources for staff and students](#)

[University of Brighton - Academic Study Kit: an online student study resource](#)

[Palgrave - Skills4Study web resource](#)

Resources for staff

[Personal Academic Tutoring at the University of Worcester](#)

[Helping students to access the right support at the right time](#)