



LJMU Research Online

Dixon, L, Fletcher, T and O'Gorman, V

Personal tutoring: a recognition of 'levelness' in the support for undergraduates

<http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/11936/>

Article

Citation (please note it is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from this work)

Dixon, L, Fletcher, T and O'Gorman, V (2019) Personal tutoring: a recognition of 'levelness' in the support for undergraduates. Innovations in Practice, 13 (2). pp. 18-23. ISSN 1757-921X

LJMU has developed **LJMU Research Online** for users to access the research output of the University more effectively. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LJMU Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain.

The version presented here may differ from the published version or from the version of the record. Please see the repository URL above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information please contact researchonline@ljmu.ac.uk

<http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/>

Personal tutoring: a recognition of ‘levelness’ in the support for undergraduates

Laura Dixon, Tom Fletcher and Valerie O’Gorman

Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University, Redmonds Building, Clarence Street, Liverpool L3 3AF, UK

Contact: l.j.dixon@ljmu.ac.uk; t.g.fletcher@ljmu.ac.uk; v.o’gorman@ljmu.ac.uk

Abstract

The changing terrain of higher education in the UK, and particularly the greater diversity of the student body, has undoubtedly led to the need for universities to provide greater support, both from frontline teaching staff and in the provision of extra institutional services. Added to the mix are sectoral concerns for the wellbeing and welfare of the student. It is therefore unsurprising that we are seeing a renewed focus on, and interest in, personal tutoring. Taking a qualitative approach, we set out to explore the needs of undergraduate students, on an event management programme, in relation to personal tutoring. Outlined in this paper are the different senses of personal tutoring as student transition through their course.

Keywords

personal tutoring; pastoral support; transition; progression

Please cite this paper as:

Dixon, L., Fletcher, T. and O’Gorman, V. (2019) ‘Personal tutoring: a recognition of ‘levelness’ in the support for undergraduates’, *Innovations in Practice*, 13 (2): 18-23



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/). As an open access journal, articles are free to use, with proper attribution, in educational and other non-commercial settings.

Personal tutoring

The changing terrain of higher education in the UK, and particularly the greater diversity of the student body, has undoubtedly led to the need for universities to provide greater support, both from frontline teaching staff and in the provision of extra institutional services. Added to the mix are sectoral concerns for the wellbeing and welfare of the student (Mistry, 2018). It is therefore unsurprising that we are seeing a renewed focus on, and interest in, personal tutoring. Whilst personal tutoring has a long history in UK higher education, as recently as 2015, a new post-16 sector association was established as a forum for discussion, debate and the exchange of ideas on issues in personal tutoring and academic advising. That association, UK Advising and Tutoring (UKAT)(2019), set out a framework for personal tutoring earlier this year and, in the spirit of the conversations leading up to the release of the framework, this paper offers a reflection on a small-scale study that was undertaken with undergraduate students on an event management degree at LJMU, to get a more insightful sense of personal tutoring from our learners.

A student-centred perspective

Being able to balance the needs of students with those of lecturers and the university itself, highlights the need for clear guidelines to allow for the successful implementation of personal tutoring, at the level of both national and institutional policy. To be able to do so successfully, however, necessitates a fuller understanding of what personal tutoring means from both an institutional and a student perspective, with a particular emphasis on any gaps or differences between the two. As explained by Mynott (2016), at LJMU the policy states that the primary purpose of the personal tutor is: “to assist tutees in their academic development whilst at university, in addition to having a

role in supporting their personal and professional development”. The policy goes on to highlight the following three roles:

- *Academic Guidance and Monitoring of Student Engagement* – this encompasses promotion of student engagement beyond their programme of study and also introduces a monitoring role in terms of identifying and responding to “at risk students through reference to data including attendance, assessment submission, and academic background.”
- *Pastoral and Personal Development and Referral* - offer pastoral oversight with referral and signposting to specialist student support and advice services.
- *Professional Development and Referral* – linking to employability and also the responsibility for writing references.



Taking a qualitative approach, we set out to explore the needs of students in relation to personal tutoring.

We gathered data from three cohorts of students – one at each level (Level 4 [first year], Level 5, and Level 6 [final year]). The questions in our online survey aimed to gather not only students’ beliefs regarding the strengths and weaknesses of personal tutoring, but also to try to tease out how personal tutoring could be undertaken more

References

- Earwaker, J. (1992) *Helping and Supporting Students*, Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education & The Open University
- Luck, C. (2010) ‘Challenges faced by tutors in higher education’, *Psychodynamic Practice*, 16 (3): 273-287
- Mistry, V. (2018) ‘Student mental health and wellbeing: a synopsis from recent sectoral reports’, *Innovations in Practice*, 12 (2): 5-12, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24377/LJMU.iip.vol12iss2article230>
- Mynott, G. (2016) ‘Personal tutoring: positioning practice in relation to policy’, *Innovations in Practice*, 10 (2): 103-112, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24377/LJMU.iip.vol10iss2article95>
- 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): 7-23
- UKAT (2019) ‘Professional Framework for Advising and Tutoring’, retrieved from: <https://www.ukat.uk/professional-development/professional-framework-for-advising-and-tutoring/> (accessed November 2019)
- Wheeler, S. and Birtle, J. (1993) *A Handbook for Personal Tutors*, Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & The Open University