

**Notes of the StARs Forum - Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014**

**17:00 – 18:30 (EE1057)**

**Topic: Academic Tutor System**

**Present:**

91 StARs

John Ryan - **JR** (Pro Vice Chancellor (Students))

Will Bowen-Jones – **WBJ** (Head of Educational Development Unit)

Tom Clarke – **TC** (Vice President Education)

**Also in attendance:**

Dave Robson – **DR** (StAR Coordinator, Institute of Health and Society)

Marie Stowell – **MS** (Director of Quality and Educational Development)

Ruth Christie – **RC** (Students' Union Membership Services Manager (taking notes))

**Welcome and Introductions** - TC welcomed everyone to the Forum and introduced himself as the Students' Union's Vice President Education.

JR introduced himself as the University's Pro Vice Chancellor (Students) and explained how important it is to the University to hear what students have to say about their University experience, both what's working well and what improvements would enhance their experience further.

WBJ explained that the focus of the Educational Development Unit is the whole student learning experience.

2 <sup>nd</sup> year Psychology	We don't feel we're told enough about who the academic tutors are. Students would have liked a direct email
JR	Should the system be re-introduced to students in their second year?
2 <sup>nd</sup> year Psychology	It matters more to students in their second year of study.
TC	We're aware that Psychology is working hard to improve, particularly in response to the disappointing results for the subject area from the National Student Survey.
2 <sup>nd</sup> year Psychology	There are too many points of contact for students. What can academic tutors do that others (eg lecturers, module leaders, course leaders) can't?

WBJ	The academic tutor system is available and accessible in addition to the support students can get from other members of staff. Who's the "go to" person? Do we over-complicate it by adding academic tutors?
JR	At different points in their University career, students access different people. The academic tutor, we hope, has oversight across all of a student's academic activities, whatever modules are studied.
2 <sup>nd</sup> year Psychology	My personal experience of talking to my academic tutor during the summer when I had health problems was that the tutor was unable to help me directly and referred me to other sources of advice and support. The academic tutor knew nothing about my academic record.
JR	We provide guidance about the academic tutor's role. The tutor's advice was sound, but he or she should have been able to look at results across all modules – this is available to academic tutors for their tutees.
1 <sup>st</sup> year Marketing	We had a social get-together in Sin where we met all of the staff, which was really good, but since then I've not been contacted by my academic tutor, who doesn't teach me.
JR	<p>We understand that students would prefer to have an academic tutor who teaches them, but this is logistically impossible.</p> <p>In the Business School, for instance, there's an intake of around 250 students and it's not possible to match them all up with tutors who teach them in any one semester.</p>
2 <sup>nd</sup> year Primary Initial Teacher Education	The academic tutor acts as a middleman, with a signposting role. We're encouraged to get involved with additional opportunities, such as WiP (Working in Partnership group). Some students, though, don't understand the role of the academic tutor – there's a lot of inconsistency.
JR	The University does strive for consistency within and across courses.
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	I've found that I've used the academic tutor more and more throughout my time here. Their role includes writing students' references. Some students don't seem to understand the academic tutor's role.

JR	Can I ask those of you in your first year whether you think staff have explained well the role of the academic tutor? <i>(Majority thought they had)</i>
Student	Is there a framework for the role?
JR	Yes – <a href="#">it's available on the University's website</a> and we'll ensure that it's sent to all StARs.
WBJ	To explain the evolution of the system, we used to have a "personal tutor" system. There has been a definite attempt in the last 4 years to move to a situation where the tutorial role is to support <u>academic</u> studies.  The academic tutor is a single person with an overview. We have also identified the critical times in a student's career when they should access their academic tutor.
Student	Some academic tutors have a very informal approach, whereas others have a very structured way of managing the role.
JR	What we hope for is consistency in terms of <u>what</u> is covered – we recognise that individual tutors will have very different approaches to achieving the same goal.
3 <sup>rd</sup> year Business	I would rather meet a tutor who is <u>teaching</u> me, not one who never sees me in class.
3 <sup>rd</sup> year student	3 <sup>rd</sup> year students think the academic tutors are great, 2 <sup>nd</sup> years think they're OK, 1 <sup>st</sup> years don't know who they are. A mandatory meeting should be organised by the academic tutor every year.
1 <sup>st</sup> year Psychology	Psychology students don't know their academic tutors – they haven't met them socially. There was an opportunity to arrange a meeting during Worcester Week 1 but most students went home that week
JR	There is certainly an expectation that the academic tutor should meet all new tutees at the start of the year. How many of you found that happened? <i>(Around 75% confirmed that this had happened)</i>
WBS	In the Business School, we have never gathered (academic tutor and tutees).  The one-to-one meeting was great, but the academic tutor

	commented that 70% of students had not responded to his emails inviting them to a meeting.
TC	When I was a student, I never responded to emails from my academic tutor. However, that was a mistake on my part.
2 <sup>nd</sup> year Film Production	I do not know what an academic tutor is – I just read the name on SOLE, but they left last year.
1 <sup>st</sup> year Conservation Ecology	We've had two mandatory tutorials – if you don't attend, you fail the course. They are built in to the mandatory module. Appointments to see your academic tutor are easy to book and very helpful. The system is working very well.
JC	I am aware that they have been using this system in the Institute of Science and the Environment for 3 years.
2 <sup>nd</sup> year PE	There is a perception among students that you do not need your academic tutor until your third year, when you need help with your dissertation.
1 <sup>st</sup> year Drama	It's been a positive experience, very helpful. All students meet all the academic tutors
2 <sup>nd</sup> year Business	<p>Students have been very disappointed by the lack of enthusiasm from academic tutors. There have been no emails and no chance to meet.</p> <p>Some students find booking appointments impossible, as the academic tutor is only available when the students are in lectures.</p>
2 <sup>nd</sup> year Primary Education	One student reported having had a tutorial while a lecture was taking place (in the lecture room while the other students were present).
JC	This isn't an acceptable arrangement. A tutorial must take place in a suitable room away from the teaching environment, where there is privacy.
3 <sup>rd</sup> year Business	Half of the students say everything's OK in relation to academic tutoring, but the other half don't know who their academic tutors are. Students have been told they can't change their academic tutor if they're not happy with them.

WBJ	It is disappointing to hear that there is no flexibility in terms of changing. This is especially so if a student has identified a good replacement that they would be happy with. I will take this forward.
2 <sup>nd</sup> year Psychology	We've had an online tutorial which was really good. I have had a different academic tutor from the one I had last year and so far, we have not met and I have had no contact.
2 <sup>nd</sup> year Psychology	Is there guidance about the availability of academic tutors? Many students have family and work commitments so it may not be possible to come at times when the academic tutor is available.
JC	There is an expectation that academic tutors will meet four times a year with their tutees.
1 <sup>st</sup> year Psychology	There was an opportunity for students to meet their academic tutor in their first week, but there's been no contact since then. We will only see them at the end of semester 2
JC	Students get feedback from all of the modules they take.  The academic tutor is the one resource available to students who has an overview. Not seeing an academic tutor until the end of the academic year is not altogether helpful – the opportunity should be made available, but it is for the student to decide whether to take this up
WBJ	There are a number of different ways in which students can access support. The module tutor's support should be regular and ongoing
2 <sup>nd</sup> year English language	Mixed reviews from students. Those who have met their academic tutors are happy, whereas the others have never met them.
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Would it be possible to have an online booking system for appointments with academic tutors?
WBJ	Some course teams are using e-booking systems successfully
Psychology	Psychology have introduced doodle polls and this works well. Students can see when academic tutors are available and book appointments online easily.

2 <sup>nd</sup> year Early Childhood	Mixed feedback from students. Academic tutors who are module leaders are very good and approachable, whereas those who are course leaders have less time and availability.
JC	We do worry about this. We are aware that senior staff have less time.
3 <sup>rd</sup> year Archaeology	We met module leaders in the first week and were assigned academic tutors. They are good.
1 <sup>st</sup> year Animal Biology	Most students have the same academic tutor (Chris Brown). He makes an effort to talk to tutees during lectures and is very helpful.
3 <sup>rd</sup> year Media and Cultural studies	One tutor provides support for lots of students who are not her tutees.
2 <sup>nd</sup> year English literature	The feedback is mainly positive, but there is a lack of understanding that students have to make an effort themselves.
TC	The SU is aware that it could certainly do more to advertise things such as Academic Tutoring out to students, to make sure they are fully aware of all the support and services out there available to them.
3 <sup>rd</sup> year Sociology	The majority of students haven't seen their academic tutor in three years. Most do not know what they are there for.
JR	Was the system not explained to them in their first year? No
Physiotherapy	Mainly positive comments – most students have met their academic tutor. They're approachable and run drop-in sessions as well as having an appointments system. Students had no choice over which academic tutor they were assigned to.
3 <sup>rd</sup> year Screenwriting	There is a stumbling block for joint honours students. I have an academic tutor from Drama, who knows nothing about what is going in in Screenwriting.
1 <sup>st</sup> year Film Studies	Feedback from students is encouraging. The academic tutor is the course leader and is very accessible. Even before starting, there were Facebook groups to help

	prepare us and the academic tutor is available after every class.
2 <sup>nd</sup> year Sociology	Improvements have been made for the new first-years. Those of us in our second years have had no real contact with our academic tutor since the initial meeting in the first year.
John	Re-induction at the start of the second and third years is under consideration. Some courses are already experimenting with this.
2 <sup>nd</sup> year Psychology	More praise for Psychology – they ran re-induction sessions and videoed them so they are available for all students.
Outdoor Adventure, Leadership & Management	The academic tutor is the course leader and is always available after lectures.
JR	It is much easier to create an immediate connection with smaller groups.
	There is a lack of continuity and consistency – some academic tutors are much better than others are.
JR	It is worth mentioning that students can ask anyone of their choice to be their personal referee – it does not have to be the academic tutor.
DR	On some professional courses, students have to have the same mentor for the duration of the three years.
Institute Rep, Education	As Institute Rep, I've been contacted by many placement students who haven't been taught by their academic tutor for the whole of their three years. Some have found that their academic tutors are away on project leave and no one is covering this part of their role.
JR	References for Initial Teacher Education students are compiled in a very different way and the system for producing these has been very good. Not sure if this applies to Early Years students too.
Masters in Nursing	The system hasn't been explained. Can we find the academic tutoring framework? <i>We will make sure all StARs have this.</i>

Human Nutrition	There has been a lot of praise from students, who have using words such as “inspiring” and “motivating” for academic tutors.
3 <sup>rd</sup> year Primary Education	There are 7 meetings per year in the first and second years, but fewer in the final year due to increased commitments and the fact that three members of staff have dropped the academic tutor role. This means that 3 <sup>rd</sup> year students have new academic tutors in their final year. Should the academic tutor arrange an initial meeting with their tutees?
JR	Yes – this should happen.
3 <sup>rd</sup> year History	Most students are happy with the academic tutor system
1 <sup>st</sup> year Nursing	Feedback from students is that all academic tutors have been “amazing” and respond quickly. Tutorial groups range in size from around 5 to around 20.
3 <sup>rd</sup> year Creative Digital Media	If students did not attend the introductory meeting in their first year, they have had no contact with their academic tutor.
	Perhaps students who have had a good experience with academic tutors could speak to the class about how it has worked for them.
JR	Informality can really work. I’m beginning to think of a few ways in which we can help academic tutors. The University sets minimum expectations and procedures are University-wide, but Institutes have flexibility in relation to how the system is delivered.
WBJ	Making the academic tutor system work for joint honours students is a difficult one to crack. We know there are some “super-tutors” who are like gold dust. It’s important that we communicate the purpose of the system to students and explain the role of academic tutors clearly. An effective system of academic tutoring is critical to academic progress.
JR	While the emphasis is on <u>academic</u> issues, students can raise personal issues that affect their progress and expect to be referred for advice and support.



A number of other issues were raised at the end of the Forum:

1 <sup>st</sup> year Nursing	I'd like to praise Dave Robson, the induction tutor for nursing. He has been a supportive presence for students since before they started, through the helpful Facebook group and the summer school.
TC	I would certainly like to echo that. Many Health students praise the work done through the Facebook group during the summer.
JR	How many of you had contact from academic staff before you started? <i>Around 30%</i>
	Our tuition fees were £8,650 in our first year and £8,900 in this, our second year, whereas students now in their third year have had tuition fees of £8,100 every year. This is not fair. The University gave us no warning of the increase in fees.
JR	<p>The University was prevented from increasing fees for current 3<sup>rd</sup> years by the rules that were introduced at the time the coalition government implemented the new fees system.</p> <p>I know that students whose fees have increased were not alerted to this via email. I can assure you that the University will give advance warning of increases in fees from now on.</p>
	Will the tuition fees remain £8,900 for our third year?
JR	<p>I'll need to check on the increase outlined in the Access Agreement, but it's probably around £300.</p> <p><b>The fee for 2015-16 will be £9,000.</b></p>
1 <sup>st</sup> year Sports Therapy	We've had to spend hundreds of pounds on sports kit, which is compulsory.
JR	My personal preference would be to make this non-mandatory.
Outdoor Adventure Leadership and Management	If it's mandatory, it's a uniform and should therefore be provided by the University.

JR	<p>All students should be aware of the full costs associated with their course.</p> <p>A booklet is produced by the University, in collaboration with the SU, which sets out all of this information and all students should be sent this before they start.</p>
TC	<p>All Students should receive this information because the Students Union is involved in packing the letters sent out to all students offering them places at the University. In these letters, we add notes detailing kit requirements.</p>
	<p>We have book lists with 50-60 books, with an average second-hand cost of around £50. There are 30 core books that we are expected to have.</p>
Adult nursing	<p>There are problems with microphones and electrical equipment, e.g. in the conference centre and the lecture theatres. This is a real issue for large classes.</p>
3 <sup>rd</sup> year Business	<p>A friend has had problems with Finance. There is meant to be a 10% discount for 3<sup>rd</sup> year students but only 2 students have had this.</p>
JR	<p>I think this is a Student Finance England issue. I am also aware of issues around the National Scholarship programme, administered through the Student Loan Company.</p>
3 <sup>rd</sup> year Business	<p>Are students to be given printing credit? This has been spoken about but we've not heard the outcome. Is there any prospect of free or at least discounted parking for those who have to travel a considerable distance to get to University?</p>
TC	<p>Regarding printer credit, this is something that once again I will be exploring with the Pro Vice Chancellor Students.</p>
JR	<p>It is likely that an amount of printing credit will be introduced from September 2015, although the amount is yet to be determined.</p> <p>The SU President has already produced an email asking the University to consider changes to car parking fees for commuting students, so be assured that discussions will be taking place on this issue.</p>

WBS	The state of the chairs in the Charles Hastings building is poor – most of them are broken and need to be replaced.
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