

Notes of the StARs Forum - Thursday 2nd February 2017

16:30 – 17:45 (EEG027) Topic:
Personal Academic Tutoring

Present:

29 StARs/Institute Reps

James Gunther – **JG** (Students' Union Vice President Education)

Ross Renton – **RR** (Pro Vice Chancellor Students)

Prof Sarah Greer – **SG** (Deputy Vice Chancellor and Pro Vice Chancellor Academic)

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

Also in attendance: Sophie Williams (Students' Union Chief Executive, taking notes)

Welcome and Introductions: **JG** welcomed everyone to the second StARs Forum of the academic year, as well as the panel. He explained the purpose of the Forum; to discuss the Personal Academic Tutoring (PAT) system. **JG** handed over to **MS**.

MS delivered a presentation outlining the University's perspective and policy on PAT, following some research in 2015/16 into what makes a PAT effective. The University believes the PAT system is in keeping with its values and the desire for students to be active members of the University, working in partnership and getting the most out of their time here. The key purpose of the PAT system is for academic support and guidance. The system is front-loaded to ensure more support in year 1, with the aim that most students will have the same PAT for the duration of their course.

MS outlined:

- The 8 key functions of the PAT from induction to tracking progress, to providing references.
- The number of meetings a student should expect with their PAT, which ideally should coincide with key transitions e.g. induction, module selection, and assessment results.
- NSS results and surveys reveal that at UoW the PAT system works better in some courses than others and that the structure and communication channels within the course are key. It has also proven to help if the PAT system is embedded in core modules.
- The system works best if meetings are scheduled in early, if tutors are proactive in contacting their tutees, if the meetings are focussed on academic and professional progress, and if both parties prepare for the meetings.
- Student feedback suggests that the purpose of the meetings should change year on year, moving towards career choices in year 3.

JG spoke about the recent PAT campaign conducted by the Students' Union that had over 770 responses and outlined the key findings, including 94% of respondents knew who their PAT was.

JG invited questions and comments from the StARs for the panel:

Questions	Response
<p>Psychology:</p> <p>There are different pathways in Psychology but if students change pathway, they do not change PAT. If someone, for example, moves from clinical to forensic psychology, they may then have a PAT who does not understand the student's field of study. Not many students know you can request a change of PAT via SOLE.</p>	<p>MS – there is a tension between someone who has got to know you over time versus a specialist in your field and there are some niche courses where there aren't many specialists, meaning that tutor would have to be the PAT for the whole course. A PAT is a point of contact and any Psychology PAT would be able to suggest who the student could speak to for more specialist guidance.</p> <p>SG – it is good to have a PAT who sees your progress over time but other academic staff can of course support you in different ways as you move through modules. We will take on board the feedback re: ensuring students being made more aware they can request a change of PAT through SOLE.</p>
<p>I have definitely seen a difference in the experience of first years who already know who their PAT is as the meetings are now integrated into mandatory modules. Third years have had a different experience, which is difficult for them, especially if their PAT is going to be their referee.</p> <p>Some students think you need to see your PAT face to face if you have a problem so we perhaps need to make it clearer that you can phone or email your PAT.</p>	<p>RR – these are very well made points and it is not always necessary to see a PAT face to face. We are looking into whether we can implement a chat function in the future.</p> <p>Do raise issues at course management committees and if you do not get the right response, you are welcome to seek help from the SU – they have access to SG and I and we will be happy to address it.</p> <p>SG – encouraged that the system has improved. Course leaders of Heads of Institute can also be a port of call if you are unhappy. Grown up conversations are encouraged between students and academics on these issues.</p> <p>JG – reiterated the support the SU are able to provide and reminded StARs on the new on-line journals which are designed specifically to help StARs seek support from the SU. The SU also has a core staff member who can advise on academic and other issues.</p>

<p>Early Years:</p> <p>PAT tutors are very helpful, booking meetings and helping us with our folder after our placements or assignments.</p>	
<p>Geography:</p> <p>My PAT was incredibly helpful in giving me more confidence and opportunities, such as volunteering etc. but I have seen cases where other students do not value their PAT or use them so we do need to promote them more.</p> <p>Supplementary comment from another StAR: Can social media be used more as I've not really seen any promotion about and all students use social media</p>	<p>MS – We try and promote the value of PATs from Open and induction days but we could always do more. Making the connection that they will provide you with a reference is key.</p> <p>Primary Education do it very well and set each students with targets to help them excel. Some science courses have skills passports (StAR in attendance from Biochemistry confirmed this was true for them).</p> <p>SG – Would be a great help if StARs can talk to students and encourage them to see the value, as they will listen to you. The SU will also continue to raise awareness.</p> <p>RR – this is a good idea and we should probably use some profiles of PATs to help promote the overall system. We should also use the new MyDay App.</p>
<p>Sport:</p> <p>It was only in my 3rd year that I found out the importance of the PAT as a reference. I have had a good relationship with mine but I know others who have not and now they are concerned about their references. This needs a lot more promotion.</p> <p>It is a 2 way process and students do need to make the effort to engage. My PAT has helped me get from B's to A's but I have put the effort in too.</p>	<p>MS – it is about skill development as much as it is about references.</p>
<p>English Lit & Creative Writing:</p> <p>We get a reply when we approach our tutors but could they contact us more proactively. I have had 2 emails from my PAT in 2 years.</p>	<p>MS – students have asked for easier ways to make appointments electronically - some courses already use doodle poll (Psychology) and we are looking at how this can be rolled out. There is also a discussion on the merits of staff having office hours versus students being able to drop in.</p> <p>RR – we have tried to implement an electronic service desk, which is difficult with our system (more than expected). We have got Microsoft 360 so we need to ensure more training for staff and students on how to use the calendar function as more could be using it than currently do.</p>

<p>Additional comment from StAR on same course:</p> <p>I feel the PAT system on our course is not structured and we were made to feel our PAT saw us to tick a box rather than being genuinely interested.</p>	<p>SG – there is a question of whether students actually want their PAT contacting them frequently. There should be contact once a term but the onus remains on the student to contact their PAT if they need some support or guidance.</p> <p>SG – this is not the experience we want you to have. We will address this after the meeting.</p> <p>MS – the NSS launches next week and we have ensured that our additional question is again 'How well have you been supported by your PAT?' so we can benchmark against previous years and continue to address courses or institutes who perform below expectations. Those who did not perform well last year will be expected to have improved this year.</p>
<p>Sport:</p> <p>Is it possible to outline to students what the role and services of the PAT are in a more overt way?</p>	<p>MS – details about the PAT role should be in all course handbooks, although we accept that not all students read these. We expect inductions to cover it too. In sport this year, PATs spent a day with their students and took them to the Arena to get to know them.</p>
<p>I am in my 4th year. During my 1st year, I met my tutor but have not since interacted with them.</p>	<p>SG - we need to be mindful of promoting PATs as providing a service as it is a 2-way relationship.</p> <p>MS – Sport are trying to ensure a system whereby students in their final year have a PAT who has taught them.</p>
<p>Sport Therapy:</p> <p>I am in my 1st year and at least 2/3 of my course have not met their PAT yet – it would have been nice for them to come and meet us in induction week. We were told who they were but have never met them and many do not know what they are for. Do all course leaders know PATs should be explained and promoted? I will raise it at Course Management Committee but can the panel help with this too?</p>	<p>SG – this issue should not exist for first years and details should be in your course handbook. Asked if the student had tried to contact them. The student replied they had not because the PAT does not lecture or teach them.</p> <p>MS – PATs can help even if they do not teach you – they can provide support across the whole programme whereas module tutors are only responsible for a piece of work.</p> <p>SG – PATs are something extra for you – always feel free to talk to other academic staff about specific work, as they will all be willing to help.</p>

JG thanked everyone for their questions and handed over to RR who informed the group about the new MyDay App, which had launched that week in response to student feedback, that the interface needed improving, particularly for mobile phone use.

RR also outlined that Monday 6th February saw the launch of the survey period, including the National Student Survey (NSS) for final year students and Course Experience Survey (CES) for first and 2nd year students. RR asked for StARs' support in promoting the surveys and encouraging students to fill them in as they do help the university to improve. All students will be entered into a prize drawer to win one of 5 mini iPads. The institutes with the highest response rates will also get £1,000 for student activities, with StARs deciding on how the money is spent.

JG thanked everyone for attending and gave details of the next StARs forums as:

- **Technology Enhanced Learning: Friday 17th March 2017 13:15 - 14:45 in RB G008 (Riverside Building)**
- **Topic TBC: Friday 28th April 2017 13:15 - 14:45 in RB G008 (Riverside Building)**

-meeting ends-