Perceptions and Principles of Personal Tutoring

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Perceptions and Principles of Personal Tutoring

Recent years have seen renewed interest in personal tutoring in the UK higher education sector, and many higher education institutions (HEIs) are reconsidering and enhancing their personal tutoring provision. There is limited research into the principles and models of personal tutoring in the UK context and no studies which identify how those operating in a personal tutor role view the best practice recommendations based on their own experience. This paper examines best practice identified in the student success, personal tutoring, and academic advising literature. Personal tutors in UK HEIs were surveyed to determine whether their perceptions of effective tutoring accord with these practices.

Significant findings are that all students must have a tutor with whom they meet individually. Tutors must support students in their personal, professional and academic development and help them to transition into effective study in Higher Education. The importance of tutor training was also highlighted.

The results of this survey are discussed in the light of the recommendations identified in the research literature, the needs of students, and the recommendations of the National Union of Students, (NUS) as embodied in the NUS Charter (2015). A set of common principles is offered as the basis of personal tutoring systems in contemporary UK HEIs. These principles seek to define an approach to personal tutoring which effectively supports students and prioritises their personal growth, persistence, and success.

Keywords: personal tutoring; principles; practices; models; academic advising.

Defining Personal Tutoring and Academic Advising

Most UK universities operate a personal tutoring system (Grant 2006). Personal tutoring is a unique feature of the UK higher education system in which the 'Proximity of staff to students, teaching methods centred on the idea of learning as a partnership, and students receiving personal attention from staff are all qualities 'intimately associated' with the reputation of the sector and the standard of teaching it provides' (Attwood 2009).

There is no single definition of the role of a personal tutor (Mynott 2016), but within the literature a basic definition is outlined as academic staff who provide holistic guidance on an academic and personal level including 'information about higher education processes, procedures and expectations, academic feedback and development; personal welfare support, referral to further information and support; a relationship with the institution and a sense of belonging' (Thomas 2006). There is also no single term used to describe such staff, and varying terms such as personal tutor, pastoral tutor, academic tutor, learning support, mentor, and guide (Atkinson 2014) are used. Some institutions (Morey and Robbins 2011) have begun to use the term academic advisor, which is consistent with the terminology used in the United States and other countries (NACADA 2017a) for such roles. The scope and purpose of the academic advising role are summarised by the NACADA Concept (NACADA 2017a), Core Values (NACADA 2017b) and Core Competencies (NACADA 2017c) of Academic Advising, and the roles of academic advisor and personal tutor are broadly synonymous (Grey and Locthie 2016). In the UK context, personal tutoring arose from the *in loco parentis* moral tutor system used since the 16th century (Earwaker 1992) at Oxford and Cambridge universities. Because of its history, the personal tutor role can have a larger scope than that suggested by the NACADA definitions. In the US, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2014) defines a national standard for the role of the academic advisor. No such standard for personal tutoring is defined by the regulatory bodies governing higher education in the UK. Wootton and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (2013) have created a National Occupational Standard for personal tutoring which originated from the further education sector. Although it is not widely used in the UK higher education sector, it does provide a good definition of the scope of the personal tutoring role.

The What Works study (Thomas 2012) found that personal tutoring can include being the first point of contact for a student, facilitating the provision of information, offering academic

support and development, enhancing employability and professional development, providing personal welfare support, offering referrals to further support and information, identifying and supporting students at risk of withdrawing, and creating a relationship with students that promotes integration and belonging. Irrespective of their demographic background attending university is a life changing event and a significant commitment from students. Personal tutoring is of significant benefit to specific groups transitioning to university study including widening access groups, such as those from cared for backgrounds or who are resident in areas of multiple deprivation, those in low representative groups and adult returners as well as BTEC students and those first in their family to attend university. It is acknowledged however that personal tutor support is needed even for those with a straightforward passage through their university life as the existence of the system reduces student anxiety (Wheeler and Birtle 1993).

Personal tutors provide 'perhaps the only opportunity for all students to develop a personal, consistent relationship with someone in their institution who cares about them' (Drake 2011). As such, personal tutors can affect students in a 'profound and continuing way' (Light 2001) and good academic advising 'helps students understand why they are required to take certain classes, why they should take their classes in a certain sequence…what knowledge and skills they can develop in each of their classes… and the connection between student learning outcomes of their department's curriculum and the knowledge and skills they will be required to demonstrate in graduate school and/or their future careers' (Appleby 2002). Personal tutors are 'the ears that listen to students and record their feedback' (Peach 2013), understanding the barriers which prevent them fulfilling their academic career (Ensign 2010) and are 'strategically placed to know the way the institution can better support students' (Miller 2016). Personal tutors have an important role to play in student retention (Webb, Wyness, and Cotton 2017; Drake 2011) and completion as 'they serve as cultural navigators

who teach students the language… and help them acclimatise to the academic environment' (Miller 2016). The literature consistently shows that academic advising delivered by academic staff 'lends prestige and credibility to the enterprise' (Reinarz 2000).

Good personal tutor support is described as the 'anchor on which the support system of the university rests' (Wheeler and Birtle 1993) and is credited with improved student experience (McFarlane 2016), student success (Battin 2014; Pellagrino et al. 2015), learning, progression, and overall student experience (Braine and Parnell 2011). Responsible and supportive personal tutors can enhance the student experience and in turn help improve retention (Webb, Wyness, and Cotton 2017), progression and ultimately completion (Smith 2008), by enabling students to connect different elements of learning (Stevenson 2009) and facilitating academic integration (Leach and Wang 2015). Student satisfaction with the personal tutoring they receive is positively correlated with learning outcomes and overall satisfaction with the educational experience (Sims Blackwell and Payne 2012). Beyond university, good personal tutoring can facilitate personal and professional development in students (Smith 2008). Those who receive good academic advising are twice as likely to thrive in their wellbeing and be engaged in their professional careers at work (Leach and Wang 2015).

Despite the evidence of their value, personal tutoring systems have come under increasing strain in recent years and have even been described as being 'in crisis' (Evans 2009) as a result of poor staff-student ratios arising from increased student numbers, academic staff prioritising research, a wider diversity of students, competing demands on resources, and changing student expectations (including value for money and staff contact time). As long ago as 1996, the Higher Education Quality Council for England expressed a 'considerable concern about the organisation' of personal tutoring in the context of rapid expansion (Rivis

1996). The National Audit Office (2007) and House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (2008) have both reported that students feel their needs are not being met and that pastoral and academic support is limited in the university experience. Many universities are responding by revisiting and revising their personal tutoring systems, which highlights the need to find effective tutoring practices and ways of operating.

Given the importance of personal tutoring to both students and institutions, it is perhaps surprising that there is limited research evidence in the UK context to identify what an ideal model of personal tutoring looks like. There is little research into this subject (Ghenghesh 2017) and that which does exist tends not to have been undertaken by those in the role, often attributed in the literature to a lack of time for practitioners to dedicate to this (Miller 2015). The situation is different in the US where a significant body of research has been amassed over the last 50 years. Due to the inherent differences in the US higher education system (for instance the role of dedicated academic advisers who do not teach students) this is often not directly transferable to the UK context.

How Personal Tutoring Supports Student Success

Student success is heavily dependent on various aspects of social integration including engagement and belonging (Beard, Clegg, and Smith 2007). A sense of belonging in Higher Education has been identified as being at the heart of student retention (Thomas 2012; Mynott 2016) and success. The academic sphere is the most critical arena for nurturing engagement which helps students feel they belong (Thomas 2012). The evidence suggests that fostering belonging is critical to student engagement particularly in the first year of the university experience (McFarlane 2016) and that developing a relationship with a member of academic staff in their discipline or programme of study enables students to feel more connected (Thomas 2012). Personal tutors thus have a key role to play in helping students

feel that they belong to an academic community and to appreciate this is as important as the academic content of programmes (McCary et al. 2011).

Smith (2008) observes that 'Once academics get to know their students, the observation and instincts of personal tutors can inform a proactive early warning system'. Students prefer to know their tutor before using them for support (Owen 2002), which is why it is suggested that the student should be allocated a tutor based in their own subject (Thomas 2012) who also teaches them (Sosabowski et al. 2003), ideally in the first year (Foster et al. 2012).

Personal tutoring is credited with fostering retention by providing personal contact (McFarlane 2016). Establishing a working relationship with academics means that when things start to go wrong for students, they have the confidence to approach staff for help (Morey and Robbins 2011), and this was evident in Calcagno, Walker and Grey's (2017) study. The extent to which a good personal tutor can aid in retaining students is unclear, however numerous studies have shown a link (Webb, Wyness, and Cotton 2017). For instance, Bowden (2008)found that students who were considering leaving university thought their personal tutor would be influential in their final decision whilst Laycock and Wisdom (2009) found that personal tutors were a contributing factor to student retention.

Existing Models of Personal Tutoring

The perception of the 'typical' student being an 18-year old school leaver studying full-time (Gidman, Humphreys, and Andrews 2000) is no longer valid. The student body is now much more diverse, and therefore a one size fits all model of personal tutoring is not possible. Instead, tutoring models should be flexible enough to satisfy the different requirements of the student body (Sosabowski et al. 2003) and as students are not a homogenous group, so personal tutoring provision should be tailored to each institution (Atkinson 2014), programme

(Battin 2014) and student needs.

Much of the literature advises that personal tutors should take the lead in communicating with their students and should take a proactive (Varney 2013) rather than a passive approach to their interactions; for instance, the monitoring of individual student grades by tutors to enable conversations with tutees about engagement and success (S. Robbins 2012). Students appear to appreciate a more proactive approach and regular monitoring of progress (Stephen, O'Connell, and Hall 2008), with students who experience this approach feeling more satisfied and connected to their Department (Jeschke, Johnson, and Williams 2001). Out-of-class communication through contact with tutors can lead to better student retention, increased academic performance, and improved learning (Leach and Wang 2015). Students highlight the need for tutors to be more proactive in establishing contact (Stephen, O'Connell, and Hall 2008), whilst Attwood (2009) advocates a proactive model in which staff are required to make contact with students on a weekly basis.

Earwaker (1992) identified three main models of personal tutoring – the *Pastoral* model in which the tutor offers support on academic and personal matters; the *Professional* model which focuses on trained staff who undertake academic advising as their sole role; and the *Curriculum Integrated* model which embeds structured group tutoring sessions into the formal curriculum. Other models described in the literature include coaching and mentoring approaches (McClellan et al. 2013; Wootton 2007).

While individual student advising sessions are the ideal, group tutorials can be necessary due to resource constraints. Increasingly the Curriculum Integrated model, or a hybrid of it, is becoming prevalent in the UK due to its efficiencies of scale and its ability to foster a sense of belonging and engagement. Typically, the group tutorials are integrated into study skills modules, and introduce students to learning at university, discussing expectations, facilitating

understanding of their own learning processes, identifying sources of expert help and advice, and encouraging peer support. This approach is particularly advocated for first year students where there are expectations of a more prescriptive style of interaction (Calcagno, Walker, and Grey 2017; Gidman, Humphreys, and Andrews 2000; Stephen, O'Connell, and Hall 2008). Students have highlighted a need for timetabled support, which this model facilitates (Stephen, O'Connell, and Hall 2008), and students are appreciative of this approach as it provides consistency of experience with their peers (Gidman, Humphreys, and Andrews 2000; Smith 2008).

The Curriculum Integrated model has several advantages. The use of group tutorial sessions facilitates the building of peer relationships, creates a sense of belonging, and develops a student's capacity to work with others and learn from their peers. Thomas (2012) found that group tutorials were beneficial; sharing feelings and concerns about their programme in a small group setting enables them to normalise many of their worries. Group tutorials also help establish a relationship with the tutor, ensuring that students know who to turn to before a problem arises (Owen 2002), and enable effective supervision within academic time constraints (Gidman, Humphreys, and Andrews 2000).

Personal Tutoring Best Practice

Almost all academic staff will be asked to take on the role or personal tutor at some point in their career (Mynott 2016). The literature acknowledges an assumption that anyone who is a lecturer can assume the role of personal tutor without any training, that it will 'come naturally' (Owen 2002; Gubby and McNab 2013). It is reported that personal tutors lack training, support, formal supervision (Banta et al. 2002; Earwaker 1992; Huyton 2009; McFarlane 2016; Watts 2011), or the time to undertake training that may be relevant (Gubby and McNab 2013).

However, personal tutors need to understand the traits valued by students. These include acting as an advocate, being empathetic, proactive, reliable and making students feel 'cared' for (Stephen, O'Connell, and Hall 2008), being enthusiastic (Thomas 2012) , approachable (Owen 2002), available, having a good level of knowledge and seeming interested in the student (Smith 2008), being supportive and non-judgmental, knowing the students name (Ghenghesh 2017), and seeing each one as a unique individual (Barker and Mamiseishvili 2014). Some of the other elements of good practice include students retaining the same personal tutor throughout their university journey (Owen 2002), giving students a reason to engage through structured support, including access to metrics on performance (Krumm et al. 2014), and building strong relationships to foster a sense of belonging. The What Works study (Thomas 2012) provides the most comprehensive outline of the successful elements of personal tutorial systems, and these are reproduced in Table 1.

A positive correlation exists between students who interact frequently with their personal tutor and their overall satisfaction levels (Hester 2010) and continuation (McFarlane 2016). Conversely, a lack of contact between students and personal tutors has a negative effect (Ghenghesh 2017) and therefore regular contact is deemed as good practice.

A formal structure to personal tutor meetings is therefore advocated. Meetings should be formally planned and ideally integrated into the curriculum (Braine and Parnell 2011) in order to encourage student attendance. Open door policies alone can be unsuccessful in encouraging students – who often cannot understand the benefit of attending at first – to make contact with their personal tutor (Neville 2007). Students frequently do not understand what they will gain by engaging in personal tutoring and therefore do not feel attendance should be mandatory (Ghenghesh 2017).

Many tutors believe that students should initiate contact with them (Gubby and McNab

2013), whilst many students feel that their tutor should be the one to initiate contact (Ghenghesh 2017). Students tend not to initiate contact because they do not understand the role of the personal tutor (Malik 2000), or because they feel intimidated by the power differences between themselves and academic staff (Stephen, O'Connell, and Hall 2008). Other factors which prevent students making contact are not being aware of who their tutor is (McCary et al. 2011), or being concerned at encroaching on the time of busy academics. Some students don't understand how their tutor could be valuable to them, either in the present, or in the future e.g. through exploring career aspirations and providing references (Gubby and McNab 2013).

Many academics also feel that meetings should not be mandatory, which can largely be attributed to the fact that they are busy and prefer to have time to undertake their other work (Ghenghesh 2017). Staff may say that they are respecting the right of students to decline their participation in personal tutoring and therefore do not follow up on students who fail to attend, but the spirit of most personal tutoring policies is the provision of effective support. Arguably students must be engaged if the support is to be effective (Trotter 2004) and therefore institutions must ensure that they set clear expectations and identify clear benefits to students. It is noted that having many meetings in itself does not improve the student experience (Stephen, O'Connell, and Hall 2008), nor do frequent meetings prevent students thinking about leaving university (McCary et al. 2011), or increase their grades or knowledge on policies or resources (Hester 2010).

Some studies have found that the number of personal tutor meetings is positively linked across all groups of students to perceptions of a supportive university environment (Miller 2016). Students should be introduced to their personal tutor within the first few weeks of starting their programme in order to begin building a relationship with them (Trotter 2004;

Smith 2008) and there should be an agreed number of meetings (Gubby and McNab 2013) which are timetabled (Stephen, O'Connell, and Hall 2008). Virtual contact has been found to be as valuable as face to face interactions (Arnold, Fisher, and Glover 1998) but should not replace face to face interaction (S. Robbins 2012), which is still valued by students (Kandiko and Kinchin 2013) and seen as the 'gold standard' by students (Myers 2008). The increasing use of technology in education places even more value on 'something distinctly human' with students (Winham 2015) and 'students increased use of technology does not translate to less need for academic advising; rather, they require trained and flexible advisors who can meet them in the best spaces to address their learning goals' (Jordan 2016).

The primary role of personal tutors in most institutions is to provide academic support, but it can be difficult to disentangle from a student's personal life and personal issues can 'spill over' into the academic context (McFarlane 2016). Students highlight the need for their tutor to strike a balance between academic support, pastoral support, and encouragement (Stephen, O'Connell, and Hall 2008). Those who have positive experiences of personal tutoring state a balanced mix of personal and academic support is essential (Stephen, O'Connell, and Hall 2008), and therefore this is an integral part of the role. Establishing and communicating clear boundaries from the outset is a fundamental skill of a personal tutor (Smith 2008) and students can feel failed by an institution where a gap exists between their expectations of support and their actual experience. Clear boundaries are essential for students to develop their coping strategies and their awareness of specialist support (Wootton 2013).

Methodology

The literature discussed in the preceding sections identifies a range of practices relating to personal tutoring and supporting student transition and success. The aim of this study was to determine the extent to which those effective practices influence the thinking and practice of

individual personal tutors ‘on the ground’. The study was conducted using a quantitative approach through a survey of those involved in the delivery and oversight of personal tutoring at UK HEIs to gather their perceptions of the personal tutoring role and the practices which make it effective. The intention of this survey was to compare tutors perceived effective practices against the effective practices identified by Thomas (2012) and others (e.g. NUS). The survey instrument was developed by the authors specifically for this study and included primarily closed questions with agree/disagree/don’t know answers. These questions sought to determine the extent to which there may be a common understanding of the main principles and characteristics of effective personal tutoring. The survey questions were based on practices identified in the literature discussed in the preceding sections.

A snowball sampling technique was used to gather responses. The survey was initially distributed to all members of UK Advising and Tutoring (UKAT), a UK sector body for personal tutors in higher education. ~95% of UKAT members are academics who act as personal tutors or who have responsibility for organising personal tutoring provision in their institution. Members were invited to forward the survey to other tutors in their institutions who might be interested in participating and ultimately it was publicised more widely through the JISCMail personal tutoring mailing list.

The survey consisted of 29 questions (see Table 2) all but two of which were closed questions. One question (‘How often should meetings occur’) gave respondents a choice from a range of options. Respondents were also asked to identify their institutional affiliation to facilitate an analysis of the extent to which responses were representative of the whole sector, or simply the practices of one or two institutions.

Results

48 responses were received from respondents representing 29 (~18%) of UK higher education institutions (HEIs) and these are summarised in Table 2. The process subscale consisted of 9 items ($\alpha = .69$), the operation subscale consisted of 16 items ($\alpha = .72$), and the responsible subscale consisted of 4 items ($\alpha = .14$).

Discussion

97% of respondents believe that personal tutoring should help students adjust to the differences between studying in higher education and studying at school/FE college, but there is no clear majority consensus that the first (transitional) year should have a greater focus for the tutoring effort. This seems at odds with the common practice of having first year group tutorial systems, often incorporated into the personal tutoring system, which focus on supporting the transition to HE study. It is also at odds with the recommendation (Thomas 2012) that provision should be front-loaded, with a greater focus given to the first year of a programme of study than to subsequent years. This result either exposes a contradiction in tutor perceptions or, more probably, is an artefact of a poor choice of wording of the latter question in the survey causing respondents to misinterpret it.

The results show that opinion is a broadly even split between those who believe that personal tutoring should have defined student learning outcomes, and those who don't, yet 84% of respondents believe that the effectiveness of the personal tutoring process should be regularly evaluated. It is difficult to see how the process can be evaluated without any objective measures of success. Defining measurable student outcomes for personal tutoring is a fundamental foundation of an evaluation and enhancement process (R. Robbins and Zarges 2011). This apparent contradiction in the beliefs of tutors probably arises because personal tutoring systems are rarely formally evaluated in UK HEIs. Formal evaluation and quality

enhancement processes are required to effect any meaningful change in the provision of personal tutoring.

A small majority of respondents believe that tutors should seek to begin the tutoring relationship by contacting students before they arrive at university, but a significant minority do not consider this important. This seems to contradict the recommendations (Thomas 2012; Foster et al. 2012) that pre-arrival contact with students helps improve their sense of being welcomed and belonging. Further research is required to understand why a significant minority hold this belief although it is suggested that it may be because those respondents and their institutions are unware of the value of early engagement with students, or because they find it operationally difficult to facilitate this engagement (e.g. because they are unable to allocate students to tutors before they join the university, thus preventing tutors from contacting students before they arrive).

Surprisingly the results showed that only a small majority of respondents believe that students should be allocated a tutor who teaches them on their programme, ideally in their first year. This seems to contradict Foster et al (2012) and Thomas (2012) who explicitly make this recommendation, stating that it helps develop the student-tutor relationship and facilitates a sense of belonging which is in turn important to persistence and student success. It is unclear why there is not greater agreement for this principle. Complying with it would require all tutors to also teach first year classes, and it may simply be that the logistical difficulty of trying to organise this results in many respondents thinking that it is not a good idea, or even possible.

Most respondents believe that all years of the degree programme should have equal focus for personal tutoring but about one third of respondents believe this not to be the case. By corollary, those respondents must believe that personal tutoring should give greater focus to

some years of the degree programme than others. Given the majority belief that personal tutoring should support transition to university study, an obvious hypothesis is that these respondents believe that personal tutoring should give greater focus to the first year of a programme. A more detailed analysis of the responses reveals that all those who did not agree (Disagree or Don't Know) with the principle that all years of a programme should have an equal focus did agree that the first year of the programme should have the greatest focus for personal tutoring. Taken together, the responses to these questions suggest that most tutors believe that all years of a programme merit equal focus in personal tutoring but where this is not the case, personal tutoring is very much seen as something which happens in the first year presumably reflecting a focus on the use of personal tutoring to support students through the transition to university (Yale 2017). It is possible that respondents were confused by the phrasing of this question as there is some ambiguity around what is meant by 'focus'. The intention of this questions was to reflect the amount of staff effort expended on personal tutoring in each year of a degree programme. It is conceivable that respondents related 'focus' to importance and thus interpreted the questions as asking whether personal tutoring was considered equally important in each year of a degree programme. In future, better piloting of the survey instrument would reduce the possible confusion arising from the phrasing of questions

71% of tutors believe that personal tutoring should involve group tutorials. This concurs with Thomas' (2012) findings on the value of small groups in in building peer relationships, promoting belonging, and supporting transition and student success. What is more interesting is why almost one third of respondents believed that group tutorials weren't appropriate or relevant in personal tutoring. The data gathered in this study does not provide sufficient information to offer any conclusions, but perhaps it is because these respondents work with a tutoring system which does not have group tutorials and they are simply reflecting their lived

experience of tutoring.

It is worthy of note that 71% of tutors believe that personal tutoring should provide an intentional programme of meaningful, structured activities and that students should be required to engage with these activities. Thomas (2012) states that effective personal tutoring is structured yet almost one third of respondents do not appear to support this view. Lowenstein (2005) argues that tutoring is teaching, and effective teaching involves a series of intentionally designed and structured learning experiences. If one accepts Lowenstein's argument, one must also accept the principle that tutoring involves a series of intentional interventions or activities. Further research is required to understand why there is not greater support for this principle amongst respondents, and to understand how effective tutoring might be delivered in the absence of a structured programme of activities.

Most respondents did not agree that all academic staff should be personal tutors, and this echoes Ghenghesh's (2017) assertion that an institution should identify those staff who are best able to undertake the role if the tutoring system is to be effective. We surmise that this perception follows from the recognised lack of training for tutors (Dhillon, McGowan, and Wang 2008; McFarlane 2016) resulting in a lack of confidence or competency to discharge the role effectively, or that some academics do not value the role of personal tutor. We suggest that, when responding to this question, many respondents were thinking of other colleagues who they may consider do not carry out the role effectively rather than reflecting on their own capability to act as a personal tutor.

There were a range of responses to the question regarding how often students should meet their tutors, with each response being selected by at least one respondent. The majority verdict was that students should meet tutors twice per semester (4 times per year). Three-four times per semester (6-8 times per year) was the second most popular response, which raises

speculation as to whether these are the two most common models in use across UK HEIs? Further study would be needed to answer this question, but it is safe to assume that meeting twice per semester was the minimum expected. It is acknowledged that the phrasing of this question was ambiguous and did not define the nature of the meeting (informal meeting, scheduled individual tutorial meeting, scheduled group tutorial meeting, interaction through other teaching activities). Common practice in many UK HEIs is for student to meet with their tutor once or twice per semester, and the consensus from this survey is broadly consistent with that. We therefore conclude that most of the respondents correctly interpreted this question as asking how many formal meetings students and tutors should have each year, though the nature of those meetings (individual or group) was not stipulated.

Limitations

We acknowledge that there are several limitations to this study. Firstly, the survey instrument used was developed specifically for this study and has not been validated by other studies, however the results are still of interest to those seeking to improve personal tutoring in their institutions. Secondly, all respondents were from the UK, so the findings do not represent a global picture. Whilst recognising the differences in personal tutoring/academic advising in other countries, the intention of this study to focus on the UK. The results presented here are useful for those working within the UK but offer insights that could be transferred to other international contexts.

Thirdly, the respondents were self-selecting and are likely to be those academic staff who are most willing to engage in personal tutoring and thus most likely to seek opportunities to improve their practice. 48 responses were received from respondents representing 29 (~18%) of UK higher education institutions (HEIs). For the closed questions, there was a clear majority response to all questions and in many cases, respondents agreed with the principle or

practice articulated in the question statement. These statements were derived from the practices identified in the literature, so we conclude that most respondents and their institutions aspire to or employ practices which have been identified as effective through other research studies.

Responses from two institutions accounted for 14% of total responses which potentially skews the results. Analysing the results with the responses from these institutions excluded makes no material difference and the majority response to each question remains the same. The proportion of respondents in agreement with each question varies by no more than 2% when these results are omitted, indicating that the full results are not skewed by the relatively high response rate from those institutions.

This survey sought to identify views on common principles and practices of personal tutoring from the perspective of the tutor. The practices identified in the survey questions were based broadly on the characteristics of effective tutoring identified in the literature, and particularly those identified by Thomas (2012) and the NUS Charter (2015), as outlined in Table 1. Our results are largely consistent with this previous body of work, but the number of responses was low, and the respondents represented less than one fifth of UK HEIs. It cannot therefore be claimed that the results are representative of the perceptions of most personal tutors or institutions.

Comparison with Student Perceptions of Effective Practice

Although this study has focused on tutors' perceptions of effective practices, it is instructive to examine how tutors' perceptions of what is effective differ from those of students and this is a key recommendation of this study. The NUS has created a Charter on Personal Tutoring (NUS 2015) which was derived from surveys of the students experience of tutoring. This

Charter outlines what students believe are the important principles of an effective tutoring process and it is instructive to compare the student-informed principles with the staff perceptions reported here. Table 3 lists the principles from the NUS Charter; a * in the table signifies a student principle which could not be corroborated from the results of our survey.

Four of the NUS Charter principles could not be corroborated from our study, which is due to our study not explicitly considering these principles. In particular, the principle of having an institution-wide procedure, comparability of experience and minimum standards of tutoring practice was not considered in our study. However, it is unlikely that many tutors or HEIs would disagree with this principle.

The principle of making full use of new technologies in personal tutoring was also not addressed in our study. There is good evidence in the literature, particularly that from the US, of the value of using appropriate technologies in advising students. Technology-facilitated approaches to communication (e.g. via messaging platforms or social media) can be effective (Amador and Amador 2014). Flipped approaches to personal tutoring harness technology (e.g. virtual learning environments, e-portfolios) to ensure that students are fully prepared before attending tutorial meetings, which in turn allows a richer, more meaningful collaboration to occur between student and tutor in the time available (Steele 2016).
Our study did not explicitly consider the setting of expectations as part of the tutoring process, though we would argue that the definition of student outcomes and the monitoring and evaluation of the process imply the need to set expectations. Partnership and co-creation are key features of the contemporary HE environment, suggesting that both staff and students should be collaboratively involved in the definition of student outcomes, and the subsequent quality assurance and quality enhancement processes.

Principles for Effective Tutoring

Based on the practices identified in the literature, the NUS Charter, and the findings of this study, Table 4 attempts to synthesise a set of principles which personal tutors and students in UK HEIs believe should form the foundation of effective personal tutoring. Practices that are supported both by the literature and the results of this study have been included. Practices that are identified by the literature, but which are not strongly supported by the results of this study have also been included where the arguments in favour of them in the literature are particularly compelling. The principle that all years of a degree programme should have equal focus for personal tutoring has been rephrased to reflect an interpretation that focus equates to importance, not the amount of staff effort expended.

These principles have been grouped into three broad themes focused on the process, the operation and delivery of personal tutoring, and the responsibilities of staff and students. These principles are essential for all UK HEIs to embed as they seek to operate effective personal tutoring systems to meet the expectations of students.

It is recognised that some of these principles may seem idealistic and difficult to achieve in practice without a considerable increase in resource. The specific financial and organisational impact of implementing these principles will depend on the practices currently in place in an institution and on the methods chosen to achieve the principles. For instance, the principle of meeting twice per semester does not stipulate the length of the meeting. In one of the authors' institutions, academic staff are currently allocated one hour per student per year for individual personal tutorial meetings but there are no fixed guidelines as to how many meetings should be held within the allotted hour. By specifying that individual tutorial meetings should last no more than 15 minutes, two meetings per semester (i.e. 4 meetings per year) could be accommodated without any increase in staff workload or the staff resource required. It could

be argued that 15 minutes is insufficient time for an in-depth developmental interaction with a student, but this is where the adoption of practices such a flipped advising (Steele 2016) can help. Such approaches require students to engage with online reflection and planning activities, and to come to the tutorial meeting prepared with information that enables a deeper, richer interaction to take place between the student and tutor in the time available. A judicious use of time, technology and tutoring approaches can make these principles feasible without significantly exceeding the confines of existing resources.

Conclusion

This article has addressed the question of whether the perception of effective personal tutoring practice by those working in the role differs from best practice advocated in the literature and has created a set of principles which should form the foundation of effective personal tutoring. The results of this study have also indicated the need for more detailed research studies to ascertain the reasons behind some of the responses given. It is recommended that further research should explore the reasons why those operating in the personal tutor role believe that:

- not all academics should be assigned as personal tutors.
- there should be an equal focus on tutoring across all years of study.
- there should be a set frequency of meeting with tutees and the rationale for the frequency selected

Further study should assess how this compares with recommendations within the literature which is published by those usually not operating in the role of personal tutor. This would help inform a model of best practice that is feasible on an operational level within the UK HEI context and therefore would have significant impact.

Further recommendations emerging from this study are to examine how tutors' perceptions of what is effective compares with those of students using instruments such as the NUS Charter principles, and how new technologies are used in personal tutoring and whether these allow more meaningful collaborations to occur between students and tutors.

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Provide a first point of contact	Purposefully provide information
Offer academic support and development	Advise on employability and professional development
Address personal welfare support needs	Meetings have an explicit academic purpose for all students
Enable students to get to know others studying on the same programme	Proactive (e.g. scheduled mandatory meetings)
Identifying students at risk	Delivered locally and embedded into or aligned with the academic programme
Fostering a relationship with academic staff, knowing the student, and promoting belonging	Underpinned by appropriate support for staff, including time allocation, support and development and reward and recognition
Front loading provision, with more meetings in the first year than in subsequent years	Partner with professional services to provide additional pastoral support and social integration.
Provide (either directly or through referral) additional academic support to improve academic performance	Regularly monitored and evaluated in terms of engagement by students, quality of advisers and outcomes for retention and success

Table 1 - Characteristics of successful personal tutoring (adapted from Thomas 2012)

Survey Statement	Subscale	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know	*N*
All students must have a tutor	Operation	**96%**	2%	2%	49
All academic staff must be assigned as personal tutors	Operation	29%	**65%**	6%	49
Students should be notified of the name of their tutor and given their contact details before they join the university	Operation	**78%**	16%	6%	49
Tutors should contact students and begin the tutoring relationship before students join the university	Operation	**55%**	33%	12%	49
Students should keep the same tutor throughout their degree programme	Operation	**73%**	20%	6%	49
Students should be allocated a tutor who teaches them on their programme, ideally in the first year of the programme	Operation	**58%**	23%	19%	48
All years of the degree programme should have equal focus for personal tutoring	Operation	**63%**	31%	6%	48
The first year of the degree programme should have greater focus for personal tutoring	Operation	**48%**	46%	6%	48
Tutoring should involve one-to-one meetings with a tutor	Operation	**98%**	2%	0%	48
Tutoring should involve group meetings with a tutor	Operation	**71%**	17%	13%	48
Tutor meetings should appear in students' timetable	Operation	**75%**	15%	10%	48
A defined schedule for meetings should exist and should be published to students	Operation	**83%**	8%	8%	48
How often should students meet tutors?	Operation	NA	NA	NA	48

Students should meet their tutor regardless of whether they feel they need the meeting	Operation	**83%**	8%	8%	48
Tutors must follow up on students who miss tutorial meetings - attendance at tutorials should be taken as seriously as attendance at teaching sessions	Responsible	**88%**	2%	10%	48
Tutors must keep records of personal tutorial meetings	Responsible	**88%**	4%	8%	48
Tutors should engage with students outside scheduled tutorial meetings and teaching sessions	Responsible	**60%**	17%	23%	48
A nominated, experienced tutor (senior tutor) should exist in each school/department. This person should take responsibility for overseeing tutoring provision and tutor development in that school/department	Operation	**90%**	0%	10%	48
All tutors must regularly engage in training and Continuous Professional Development relating to their personal tutoring practice	Responsible	**90%**	4%	6%	48
The tutoring/advising process should have an intentional, structured programme of meaningful activities which students are required to engage in	Process	**71%**	15%	15%	48
Tutoring/advising should be personalised to the needs of individual students	Process	**89%**	2%	9%	46
The tutoring/advising process should have a defined and published set of student (learning) outcomes	Process	**52%**	28%	20%	46

The tutoring/advising process should be evaluated to ensure that it is meeting its stated objectives	Operation	**85%**	9%	7%	46
Tutoring/advising should support student academic development	Process	**96%**	0%	4%	46
Tutoring/advising should support student personal and professional development	Process	**98%**	0%	2%	46
Tutoring/advising should involve (collaborative) goal/target setting, and monitoring of achievements against targets	Process	**78%**	18%	4%	45
Tutoring/advising should help students to learn how to learn and engage in effective study practices	Process	**98%**	2%	0%	45
Tutoring/advising should help students understand and adjust to the differences between studying in Higher Education and studying at school/FE college	Process	**98%**	2%	0%	45
Tutors should help students interpret assessment results and feedback, to help them improve their academic performance	Process	**96%**	4%	0%	45

Table 2 - Survey questions and summary responses

All students should be entitled to a named personal tutor
All students should meet their tutor at least once a term
Staff should be given full training on being an effective personal tutor
* There should be an institution-wide procedure for personal tutoring (comparability of experience/minimum standards)
* Staff and students should set mutual expectations
The personal tutoring system should be adaptable (tailored) to students' needs
Personal tutoring should support both academic and personal development
Understanding assessment feedback should be integrated into personal tutoring
* Personal tutoring should be recognised in staff reward and recognition schemes
* Personal tutoring should make full use of appropriate new technologies

Table 3 - Principles of effective tutoring from NUS Charter on Personal Tutoring (NUS 2015)

The Personal Tutoring Process
The tutoring/advising process requires student engagement in an intentional and structured programme of meaningful activities
The tutoring/advising process has a clearly defined and published set of student (learning) outcomes
Tutoring/advising supports student academic, personal, and professional development
Tutoring/advising is personalised to the needs of individual students
Tutoring/advising involves (collaborative) goal/target setting, and monitoring of achievements against targets
Tutoring/advising helps students learn how to learn, and to engage in effective study practices
Tutors help students to interpret assessment results and feedback to improve their academic performance
Tutoring/advising helps students understand and adjust to the differences between studying in Higher Education and studying at school/FE college
Staff and students set mutual expectations
The Operation and Delivery of Personal Tutoring
All students **must** have a tutor
Students are allocated a tutor who teaches them on their programme, ideally in the first year of the programme
Students retain the same tutor throughout their degree programme
Not all academic staff are required to act as personal tutors
Students are notified of the name of their tutor and given their contact details before they join the university
Tutors contact students and begin the tutoring relationship before students join the university
Personal tutoring involves both one-to-one and group meetings with a tutor
All years of the degree programme have equal importance for tutoring/advising, and the first transitional year should not have greater importance than subsequent years
A defined schedule for meetings exists and is published to students. Tutor meetings should appear in students' timetable
Students meet tutors at least twice per semester, regardless of whether they feel they need the meeting
A nominated, experienced tutor (senior tutor) exists in each school/department. The senior tutor should take responsibility for overseeing tutoring provision and tutor development in that school/department
The tutoring/advising process is continually evaluated to ensure that it is meeting its stated objectives
Responsibilities and Expectations of Personal Tutors

Tutors follow up on students who miss tutorial meetings - attendance at tutorials should be taken as seriously as attendance at teaching sessions
Tutors keep records of personal tutorial meetings
Tutors engage with students outside scheduled tutorial meetings and teaching sessions
All tutors commit to, and regularly engage in, training and Continuous Professional Development relating to their personal tutoring practice

Table 4 - A set of principles for effective personal tutoring