

**Title:**                    **Transforming Academic Tutoring: A Collaborative Work in Progress**

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### **Session Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

#### *Objectives*

- To explore how the University of Reading is transforming academic tutoring to enhance the student learning experience.
- To highlight the benefits for student success and wellbeing of our improved student-centred tutoring system.
- To identify collaborative strategies for meeting the challenges encountered in making the changes to improve the student experience.
- To share key examples of good practice to support students as they progress through their courses and make transitions between educational levels.

#### *Intended Learning Outcomes*

By the end of this session, participants should have:

- Gained insight into ways to improve academic tutoring systems to support student progression through and transition between educational levels.
- Learned from our experience in how to avoid some of the pitfalls of collaborative projects to effect change and improve the student experience.
- Gained practical ideas for supporting student success and wellbeing in their own context.

#### *Key Takeaways*

- Consultation with and communications for students and staff are vital when introducing change.
- Students and staff must be supported throughout the process.
- Resources for students and staff need to be provided in order to embed change.

### **Session Outline**

Motivated by a desire to better meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body and respond to the challenges faced by academic staff in delivering pastoral support, the University of Reading established a strategic project to explore options for improving the

well-established Personal Tutoring System. The result of this collaborative project is our new Academic Tutor System, launched in September 2018.

The Academic Tutor System strategic project has changed the way that we think and approach academic tutoring at Reading. The Academic Tutor System shifts the emphasis away from an overly pastoral role for Academic Tutors whilst investing in additional support services, notably through the introduction of a new Student Welfare Team to support students with any personal challenges that may impact their studies. Staff overseeing the Academic Tutor System are recognised and supported in their leadership roles.

Our holistic approach allows academics to focus on the support they can offer students academically and professionally, working in partnership with their tutees to support their transition, progression and learning development through proactive relationships, structured academic conversations and signposting to specialist services for ongoing pastoral support as appropriate, including the new Student Welfare Team.

As with any change project, there were challenges to overcome, and our presentation will highlight some of the issues and how they were resolved. Collaboration and consultation with students and staff formed a key part of the project. We will emphasise the practical support offered to staff, and the key role played by the resources that were developed to ease the transition, and how equivalent student-facing resources have communicated the changes to students. As a work in progress, we will be evaluating how far we have come, the impact on student success and wellbeing, and where we are headed, bringing the audience with us on this journey.

### **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

Audience members are asked to bring their own device (smartphone, tablet or laptop) so that they can engage with this session. This will be an interactive session, based around our collaborative project. Rather than a traditional presentation followed by a Q&A, this session will be a blend of presentation and discussion throughout. We will be using audience interaction using apps (such as Mentimeter) to engage and inspire the audience to reflect upon their own experiences of collaborative projects to effect change and improve the student experience, and to reflect upon appropriate levels of support to students as they transition between educational levels. We will share some of the lessons that we have learned through our collaborative project and encourage the audience to consider how our experience might influence and impact on future projects to support student success and wellbeing within their own institutions.

By using apps to gauge the audience's views, opinions and ideas (through the creation of word clouds, voting, rating statements and free text contributions), the group as a whole can identify and reflect upon their experiences of the barriers to supporting students and the advantages and disadvantages to collaborating with students and staff across an institution to effect change and improve the experience for students. By using apps anonymously but with results displayed on screen for the entire group to consider, participants may feel more empowered to reflect honestly upon their own experiences.

The results of the interaction can be shared with participants at the end of the session, so that they can use them as the basis for further reflection and future discussions and planning.

Technical details:

The app Mentimeter can be run from a webpage on a laptop or PC and uses the same projector as traditional slides. The audience use their own smart devices (phones, tablets and laptops) to interact. The presenters can pose a question or invite comments using Mentimeter on the projector screen with a code that the audience types into their own personal device on a webpage - they can then answer the questions, vote, rate statements, or make a comment individually, which will appear on the projector screen, so we can share the audience's views live. At the end of the session, I receive a file with the responses and screenshots of the different response screens, which can be easily shared with delegates after the event.

Indicative questions:

- What are the practical barriers to supporting students in your institution?
- What strategies have you employed to support students transitioning to and within University?
- What is your experience with collaborative projects? What worked well? What were the difficulties?
- What are your key takeaways from this session which you will use in future?

**References**