

**Title:** Beyond survival: redefining and invigorating the personal tutoring relationship.

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### Session Learning Outcomes

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

- Recognise challenges facing personal tutor systems in the New Higher Education
- Critically examine the role and status of personal tutors
- Reflect on student perspectives and expectations of the student-tutor relationship
- Recommend strategies to facilitate developmental and supportive personal tutoring

### Session Outline

Student evaluation, conversations with colleagues and a recent cross-institutional review reveal that our personal tutoring system lacks consistency. While the system does provide a pastoral 'safety net' for all, and there are pockets of excellence, there is considerable variation in the definition and effectiveness of the role and consequently a risk of failing to meet student needs and expectations, as discussed by [Stephen, O'Connell](#) and [Hall](#) (2008) and Laycock (2009). The student voice and institutional survey suggested that the relationship was most effective when it was active, mutual and not just perceived as a problem-solving mechanism.

Defining the personal tutor role as largely a pastoral, remedial safety net for surviving problems risks framing all student-tutor interactions around the negative. While we recognise this pastoral role is important, we wanted to add balance by encouraging more positive, developmental interactions, redefining the relationship to align it with existing examples of excellence.

This discussion paper presents a two-pronged approach to engage and inspire tutors *and* students. This involved an evidence-based and systematic overhaul of personal tutor responsibilities, expectations, CPD and recognition to invigorate the role (October 2015 - August 2016), while simultaneously partnering with the student union to develop and pilot a tutor-supported student award scheme (September 2015 - June 2016). The award requires students to strategically reflect on curricular or extra-curricular activity, demonstrating development of key attributes. This process is supported by students' personal tutors and facilitates constructive, developmental conversations. Pilot data, for presentation, provided

evidence of increased student self-awareness and the transformative potential of the scheme, and secured a further two years funding for a second phase, focussing on personal tutor engagement and upscaling.

Our aim is to provide a framework to harness the developmental and supportive potential of personal tutoring, and consequently increase the perceived prestige of this important relationship.

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

The outline of the workshop is as follows;

25 minutes presentation with integrated points for participant discussion.

20 minutes of questions and exploration based on participants' interests and experiences of personal tutoring.

Indicative questions:

How is the personal tutoring role and relationship perceived in the new Higher Education?

How are other people defining and balancing the relationship?

How can we encourage authentic, developmental conversations?

How might these approaches work with different students, in different contexts?

### **References**

[Stephen](#), D.E., [O'Connell](#), P., & [Hall](#), M. (2008) 'Going the extra mile', 'fire-fighting', or laissez-faire? Re-evaluating personal tutoring relationships within mass higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 13 (4), 449-460.

Laycock, M. (2009) *Personal Tutoring in Higher Education – Where Now and Where Next? A literature review and recommendations*. SEDA Special 25. London: Staff and Educational Development Association.