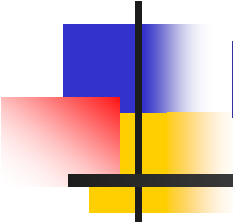


“I never thought how I learn, just that I learn...” – an evaluation of the role of personal tutor support in developing self regulatory learners



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# Presentation outline

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- The research project
  - Aims and methodology
  - Context
- Description of cohorts compared
- Findings
  - The Student Perspective
  - The Tutor Perspective
- Conclusions



# The research project

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- **Aim** - to establish if including personal tutor support for PDP within a credited module resulted in better adjustment to HE learning and engagement with the process by students
- **Context**
  - Requirement for all HEIs to provide structured support for students to engage in PDP process
  - Widening participation – increased need support for orientation to learning at HE level
  - Need for development of “self regulatory” learners
  - University of Salford - “partially devolved approach”
  - Case Study School – credited and non- credited approaches



# Methodology:

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- Evaluation of experience of three different cohorts for whom arrangements for PDP support differed
- Qualitative
- Focus groups with each cohort (22 students in total)
- One to one semi structured interviews with 10 tutors
- Independent facilitation and transcription



## Methodology contd:

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- Analysis of responses to identify themes and to establish if differences between cohorts with regard to:
  - Understanding of and confidence in learning at university
  - Ability to articulate range of skills needed to be successful
  - Ability to identify and discuss use of those skills
  - Satisfaction with support for adjustment to learning at university



# Cohort comparison

Cohort A	Cohort B	Cohort C
No personal tutor Support provided on adhoc basis by programme leader	Small group tutee meetings with personal tutor – not formally timetabled	Formally timetabled group tutee meetings with personal tutor
PDP process not made explicit	PDP process explicit but as an addition to credited curriculum	PDP process explicit and part of credited module



## Findings : The Student Perspective - Understandings of learning at University

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- All 3 cohorts

- recognised need for self motivation and independent learning
- Commented that there was less guidance than used to

*“you don't get pushed to do them” “there is a lot less information given” “its more up to you”*



## The Student Perspective - Ability to identify and discuss use of skills for successful study

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- All 3 cohorts able to identify and discuss use of study skills
- Responses indicated very limited awareness of meta cognitive approach – more emphasis on practical study skills
  
- Cohort A - needed more prompting
- Cohorts B and C
  - better able to engage in discussion of use of skills
  - more use of phrases which suggested a self review and self regulatory approach
    - “scheduling work so not last minute”*
    - “I’ve picked up what works best for me”*



## The Student Perspective – availability of support

No.of students in focus group	Cohort A	Cohort B	Cohort C
	No. of comments	No. of comments	No. of comments
Felt supported	0	7	9
Didn't feel supported	15	1	0



## The Student Perspective – sources of support

Sources of support	Cohort A No. of comments	Cohort B No. of comments	Cohort C No. of comments
Personal tutor	0	1	8
PDP support material	0	1	0
Fellow students	3	1	2
Library staff	0	1	1
Lecturers/ programme leader	2	4	0
Employer	0	1	1



## The Student Perspective – satisfaction with support received from personal tutor

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- Positive comments
  - Cohort B - 4 comments
  - Cohort C – 11 comments
  
- Negative comments
  - Cohort B - 2 comments
  - Cohort C – 1 comments



# The Student Perspective

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- Types of support provided by personal tutors
  - Discussing feedback
  - Confidence building/moral support

- Benefits

“its just moral support,there’s somebody there who you can talk to”

“I found my personal confidence low in the first semester---the personal tutor put the confidence back in you and helped you”



## Student perspective contd:

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- Benefits contd

“you just have a bit more confidence when you walk out of the room and he’s reassured you”

“the tutor encouraged and advised me when I was feeling like giving up”

“my last tutorial was great, because she sat down and went through all the options available”

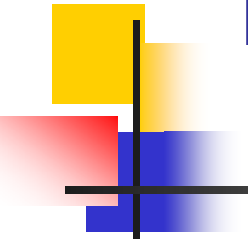


## Student perspective - Concerns of those who did not have clear arrangements for personal tutor support

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- Some uncertainty about what was required
  - "you are not given many guidelines on what you should be looking for, what you should be aiming at"*
  - "haven't really had any guidance on study skills"*
- A need for confidence building
  - "I think you need more spoon feeding than just someone saying right there's an assignment, go away and research'. Where do start"*
- Concern at lack of clear focus for support and guidance
  - "we've just been left to our own devices"*
  - "you are just a number on a course really"*

## Student perspective - How support from a personal tutor could be improved



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- Regular meetings throughout year
- Clear purpose and focus to meetings
- Needs to be formal requirement to ensure participation
- Preference by some for one to one meetings
- Tailor support to meet needs of different groups of students
- Flexible use of PDP support materials
- Avoid over concentration on weaknesses – can be demotivating

# The tutor perspective - Impact of PDP and personal tutor support on student adjustment to studying at university



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- Felt students had developed strategies for improving learning
  - Not clear if direct correlation with PDP support

*"we are giving them the ammunition and tool box ...but there is no clear evidence"*
  - Anecdotally, some felt PDP had helped

*"there were a couple of students who started off quite weak...they did improve..I think engaging in this process played a part"*

*"they can talk about how they work and what strategies they use and they seem to find that useful"*

*"I don't think the level of uncertainty, despair almost, was present with this cohort as it was in previous years"*



# Tutor perspective – views on role of personal tutor

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- Benefits
  - Support for students – regular contact, confidence building  
*“a venue, an opportunity, to actually think through what it means to study”*
  - Better insight into student experience and concerns
- Issues
  - Time
  - Availability of rooms
  - Timetable clashes
  - Tutors do not necessarily have skills for role
  - Not all tutors see value



## Tutor perspective - Inclusion of PDP and personal tutor support within a credited module

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- **Advantages**

- Student motivation, more willing to participate if credited
- Structure and co-ordination when part of a credited module

- **Disadvantages/issues**

- Danger of tick box approach



# Conclusions

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- Personal tutor support valued (discussing feedback and confidence building)
- More consistency in support when part of credited module
- Inclusion in credited module results in more serious participation by students and tutors and more co-ordination and focus



## Conclusions contd

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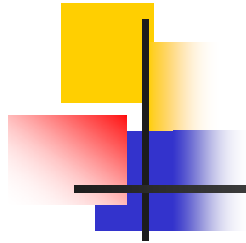
- PDP resources need adjusting to meet interests/concerns of different cohorts
- PDP activities do not need to be labelled 'PDP'
- Supporting students in a PDP process can help tutors to become more reflective practitioners



## Conclusions contd

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- Unclear if PDP support results in more self regulatory learners but :
  - Does impact on confidence in ability to study
  - Gives students the language to discuss their learning with tutors
- Need for recognition that developing a self regulatory and reflective approach takes time First year students more concerned with practical issues.  
*"I never thought how I learn, just that I learn"*



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