

PASS tutorial system: pro-active support for transition to university and safety net for vulnerable students

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Oxford Brookes University

- 1992 'New' University, formerly Oxford Polytechnic
- 5 campuses: 3 close together in NE Oxford; the other 2 are outside Oxford
- Approx 18,000 students of whom:
- 10,000 Undergraduates, including 1000 part-time students

School of Life Sciences

- **650 Undergraduate Students** on 16 degree fields in Biomed/Molecular Biology, Human Biosciences, Environment
- **100 Post-graduate Students** of whom:
- **60 studying 9 taught Masters** programmes (eg: Environmental Management, Applied Sport and Exercise Nutrition, Biotechnology, Bioimaging, Conservation Biology)
- **40 Research Students** studying for PhDs

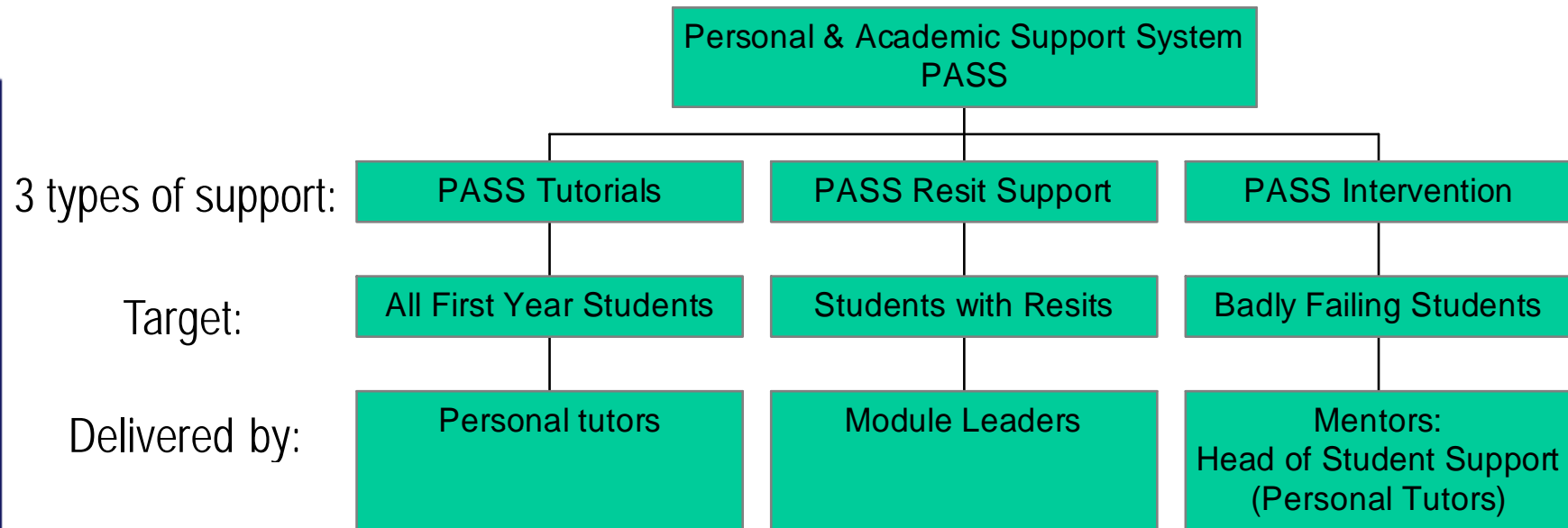
Academic issues and transition

- Differences between teaching at school and university
- Differences in assessment patterns
- Communicating these changes
- Supporting students as they adjust to these changes

Experiences and Expectations

School	University
Taught to a strict syllabus, to learn key phrases that they must remember and regurgitate, not to read widely	Want them to be open and exploratory in their thinking, to read widely, go beyond the basic syllabus
Resubmit coursework a number of times until they get high enough grades	Expect to receive completed coursework for assessment and don't allow resubmission
Retake modules to improve their marks and achieve higher A level grades	Module grades are final. Any resit is capped at a bare pass (40%). Can't repeat modules to raise average mark

Under the PASS Umbrella



Future Developments:

Year 1: PASS Tutorials: Introduce Peer Mentors (Year 2 students) to assist PTs

Year 2: PASS Seminars: Bespoke programme to deliver Personal Development, Careers and Bioethics

PASS Intervention: Train Personal Tutors to assist with mentoring students

Role of PASS tutorials

- Establish good staff/student interactions
- Discipline-based groups for academic advice
- Provide study skills training
- Build peer support
- Nurture students

Role of Personal tutors

- Oversee the academic progression of their tutee
- First port of call for a student needing help or advice
- Encourage realistic academic expectations
- Teach students study skills through structured activities
- Be a role model for the next generation of scientists

Personal & Academic Support System

- **Proactive, building relationships:** Staff – Student; Student – Student
- **Expectations:** Why am I here? What are my aims? How can I achieve them? Personal Development Planning (PDP)
- **Academic Support:** Study Skills, generic support
- **Feedback:** How am I doing? How can I improve?
- **Intervention:** Call students in, chase them up to get on task
- **Pastoral Care:** I have a problem... Non-academic issues: Money, Family, Housing, Illness, etc.
- **Referring on:** To PASS coordinator and thence to specialist help: Student Services, Students' Union Advice Centre

Semester 1 PASS Programme

- **Week 0 Induction:** One-to-one meeting between Tutor and new Tutee: Introductions; Understanding timetables; Ask tutees to look at My PDP
- **Week 3 Tutorial 1:** Time & task management; PDP; Medical Certificates; Taking notes in lectures; Making notes from written sources; Review choice of essay
- **Week 5 Tutorial 2:** Academic Standards and Regulations; Good academic practice and referencing; Essay structure; Requirements for annotated bibliography and essay plan
- **Week 7 Tutorial 3:** Assessment and grading criteria; How much time to spend on assignments; Receive feedback on annotated bibliography and essay plan
- **Week 10 Tutorial 4:** Making the most of feedback on coursework; Review of time & task management: Revising for exams; Submitting essays *via* Turnitin and paper copy

Semester 2 PASS Programme

- **Week 1 or 2: One-to-one meetings:** Review of Semester 1: How are you getting on? Are you on target? PDP statement; Give feedback on essay-writing assignment
- **Week 3 Tutorial 5:** Engaging with Groupwork; How to design an academic poster;
- **Week 5 Tutorial 6:** Putting together your Stage 2 programme
- **Week 7 Tutorial 7:** Check Stage 2 programmes; check poster groups are on task
- **Week 10:** Peer assessment of posters
- **Week 11 or 12: One-to-one meetings:** Give feedback on poster; review of year; PDP; feedback from students
- **End of Year:** Review: Receive Student and Tutor feedback

Personal Tutor perspective

- As a new member of staff I have been particularly impressed with the PASS system as a means of student support. It is an organised and effective means of both supporting students and providing essential guidance and information.
- PASS sessions provide a forum for students to discuss problems both with me and their peers. The sessions are very well organised and ensure that all students are familiar with basic skills such as note-taking, referencing, planning, exam revision to name but a few.

Staff perspective on PASS tutorials

- “When I first came here I found the scheme really helpful because you’re straight away introduced to the students, you straight away put a face to a name...”
- “I think the content is quite good, I mean the referencing... having it embedded in the PASS session is definitely the right place for it.”
- “It went fine in the actual session, and then when I got in their essays the references I got were terrible...so then I went back and of course did another session on referencing afterwards”
- “This system has definitely been much more helpful to get to know the students, and give them some real information - I think that’s probably the real thing.”

PASS tutorials, what students say...

- “They’ve all been very, very helpful and constructive.”
- : “The referencing one was brilliant; otherwise my referencing would have been horrendously wrong!”
- “...the choices thing was particularly useful, because I was really struggling with my choices (second year programme choices)...”
- “it’s...another side of the way she helps us and she sits down and she went through a lot of different ways to study and everything, which was quite helpful...”
- “They (PASS tutorials) help you during your course, for example scientific writing and things... “
- “It’s kind of...just making you...reflect on yourself.”
- “...in the group meeting you just get to know somebody new...so basically that is a link of a new relationship”
- “I’m really happy with the PASS tutorials...I got to meet people as well, which is good.”

Student thoughts on Personal tutors...

- “Support...life support!”
- “If you need any sort of help with...disabilities or dyslexia or something, or you don't really know who to go to, I...go to her first and...expect her to point me in the right direction...”
- “I think the role...is someone who you know within the establishment, who, when you think everything's just a bit too much, can just save you a bit....”
- “She told me who to speak to, and she offered me some ideas...which was quite good”
- “[Tutorials] have gone on really well. He's very student-oriented.”
- “It's just nice whenever I have something on my mind I usually go and chat to [my Personal Tutor] about it...”
- “It's just been brilliant from day one...”

What the students say

- PASS referral: Student with a broken relationship that threatened to sink him academically. We talked, I referred him to a counsellor who helped him with his issues. We also had weekly meetings:
- 'Thank you for the time and support you have given to me, no doubt I'll be back again (to see you) soon but I'm hoping in a much better condition. I've found talking to you very comforting. Thank you

PASS Intervention

- Working with badly failing students to try and turn their performance round, reverse the downward spiral
- Identify students with poor performance in semester 1 assessments
- Put in place intervention measures and additional support for their studies

PASS Intervention Method

- Failing students given appointments for individual interviews to discuss their results and offer extra support.
- Support available was mentoring, 1:1 study skills and/or maths tutorials, and counselling.
- Main reason for failure: poor time / task management
- Mentoring through follow up interviews

Academic Outcomes

PASS Intervention 2007 and 2008

46 students with multiple fails identified

42 students participated of whom

- 25 have reached Year 2 60%
- 8 continue in Stage 1 19%
- 6 excluded 14%
- 3 left 7%
- All had been at risk of exclusion

What the students say...

- Hi Sue, Just wanted to say a massive thanks for helping me out over the last year or so!..I've got my results!..Skin of the teeth sort of stuff, but great that I got into my second year!..
- I'm just writing about how your personal meetings with me during semester two helped me improve significantly. At the start I felt lost and had no idea how to plan out my work in an orderly fashion, until you suggested that having a timetable to help organise the way I work helped improve the level of my work, as I got it done on time and with no worries at the end. Thank you so much for you kindness and help during the last part of the year, it really did help me as you have seen.

What the students say...

- “After failing two modules in the first semester of my first year (2006) I was required to attend PASS meetings in the second semester.
- For me the meetings proved to be extremely helpful and productive with my second semester work allowing me to get over the shock of the first semester by moving forward.
- Having the one to one meetings relieved the stress and uncertainty of failing exams by giving me the mindset to taking my second semester one bit at a time.
- Sue kept me focussed on retaking one of the failed modules that I consequently passed while allowing me to consolidate my thoughts/ feelings on the future, making me a more determined individual.”

Discussion

Students responded to personal contact:

- Put in place individual study plan
- Students held accountable
- Good study habits being learnt
- Preventing repetition of poor performance
- Prevented total despair and drop-out

Benefits

Evidence that monitoring progress and early intervention produced:

- Improved student motivation
- Improved student engagement
- Halted downward spiral
- Improved student morale and self-esteem
- Improved performance in Semester 2 assessments
- Improved student retention for the School
- (Savings of approx £20k per student retained)

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