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Keele
University

Pastoral support in higher education: a survey
of university provision and students'
perceptions of it

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Abstract

This thesis examines how students perceive pastoral support in universities and suggests changes to pastoral care which can make the support more personal and effective. 'Pastoral support' and 'personal tutoring' are terms commonly used in higher education but with a poor understanding of their nature, purpose and outcomes and an evident lack of consistency in delivery within universities.

Research in personal tutoring and pastoral care focuses primarily on the personal tutor and structures of university delivery. The personal tutor role is often seen by academic staff as low status and often under-resourced. Many staff are poorly equipped to deliver the complex range of mentoring and support required, which has a much wider remit in terms of managing student retention, progression, attainment and autonomy.

This thesis explores the literature on defining the roles of personal tutors and pastoral support and the challenges facing students. It adopts a mixed method approach, including an online survey, focus groups and interviews with staff and students. This triangulated design, using data collected in 2016, involved students and staff at Harper Adams University (HAU) and Keele University (KU). The research includes an evaluation of the universities' policy and support structures for personal tutoring and additional service provision. The primary focus was on the students' perceptions of the service provided and takes a critical realist approach to evaluating this provision.

The research provides a rich sample of quantitative and qualitative data evaluating the student experience. Whilst most views are positive, some shortfalls in delivery and management are evident. Keele University students appear to use support services more than HAU, but the service is rated better at HAU. The mixed results from this research show what happens in institutions with different support structures and cultures and raises some important questions about how pastoral support is effectively delivered.

Acknowledgements

Dedication

This research and thesis are dedicated to the memory of my inspirational parents Prof. Fred and Joyce Pautard (nee Newman). Both my parents were huge supporters of lifelong learning. My father achieved his PhD in his thirties with a family of four young children to support, whilst working as a research assistant for his mentor and eminent scientist Prof. William Astbury at Leeds University. My mother achieved a degree after the war when few women studied BSc in Science and extended her passion and learning by achieving a BA Arts degree in her sixties and a Masters in Arts in her seventies.

Sadly, neither of my parents were aware of my EdD journey, but their love of learning and ‘never give up’ attitude, has driven me all my life.

“Success is a little like wrestling a gorilla. You don’t quit when you are tired. You quit when the gorilla gets tired”.

Robert Strauss

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My journey from a quantitative research scientist and educator to a journey entering and exploring the field of social science has been both fascinating and at times, a personal challenge. This expedition into uncharted territories would not have been possible without the support and involvement of many people.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
List of abbreviations	x
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Contextualising the Research	3
1.2.1 The use of the terms ‘Pastoral’ and ‘Personal’ support and care	3
1.2.2 The issues surrounding pastoral support in Universities	6
1.2.3 The Charter on Personal Tutoring (NUS 15).....	8
1.2.4 The Provision of pastoral care: current models and frameworks used in HE.....	9
1.2.4.1 Staff qualities and support meetings	10
1.3 The Research Philosophy	14
1.4 The Research for this thesis.....	18
1.4.1 Historical perspective of pastoral care in UK Universities	21
1.4.2 An outline of the research questions and methodology	23
1.4.3 Outcomes from this research	24
1.5 Chapter Summary	25
1.6 Thesis Outline.....	25
Chapter 2: Literature Review	26
2.1 Examples of Models and Frameworks in Universities	26
2.2 The Role of the Personal Tutor	30
2.2.1 Coaching and Mentoring.....	33
2.2.2 Staff training and development	35
2.2.3 Relationships and boundaries.....	36
2.2.4 At risk students	37
2.2.5 Embedding Personal Tutoring in the curriculum	40
2.3 Recording data: the use of Dashboards and Learning Analytics.	42
2.4 National Monitoring of the Student University Experience.....	46
2.4.1 Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)	46
2.4.2 The Office for Students (OfS)	48
2.4.3 National Student Survey (NSS).....	50
2.5 What are the issues faced by students in HE?	52
2.5.1 Mental Health and Wellbeing	52
2.5.2 Duty of Care and Student Support.....	58
2.5.3 Transitioning to Higher Education	60
2.5.3.1 The role of social media in supporting transition to university	63
2.5.4 Imposter syndrome and developing student confidence and resilience.....	65
2.6 Widening Participation	70

2.6.1 A brief history of widening participation in Universities	70
2.7 Financial Concerns of going to University	74
2.8 Accommodation	81
2.9 Chapter Summary	83
Chapter 3: The Universities and their Support Systems.....	84
3.1 The Universities used for this research study	84
3.1.1 Harper Adams University, Newport, Shropshire.....	84
3.1.2 Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire.....	85
3.2 Awards and Recognition	86
3.3 Institutional Characteristics.....	87
3.4 The International Strategy for Keele University and Harper Adams University.....	90
3.5 The structure of the support systems	91
3.6 Chapter Summary.....	95
Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods	97
4.1 Introduction	97
4.2 Research Aims and Objectives.....	97
4.3 Methodology.....	99
4.3.1 The Research Philosophy.....	99
4.3.2 An outline of the research questions and methodology	100
4.3.3 The Research Data Collection: The Rationale and Process	102
4.4 The Thesis Proposal Pilot	104
4.4.1 The pilot protocol.....	104
4.4.2 Evaluation of the pilot.....	106
4.5 The Data Collection.....	109
4.5.1 Quantitative Data: The online survey	109
4.5.2 Qualitative Data 1: Focus Groups	112
4.5.2.1 Analysing focus group data.....	115
4.5.3 Qualitative Data 2: Personal Interviews.....	117
4.5.3.1 Student interviews.....	117
4.5.3.2 Staff Interviews	118
4.6 The researcher's role and influence in this research	119
4.7 Ethics approval for the research	121
4.8 Chapter Summary.....	123
Chapter 5: The Research Results and Analysis	124
5.1 Introduction	124
5.2 Quantitative analysis: The online survey	124
5.2.1 Online survey analysis.....	125
5.2.2 Statistical Analysis of the Online Survey data	134
5.3 Qualitative Analysis: The Focus Groups	145

5.3.1 Harper Adams University Focus Group	147
5.3.1.2 Analysis	150
5.3.2 Keele University Focus Group	151
5.3.2.1 Analysis	155
5.3.3 Analysis between Keele University and Harper Adams University focus groups.....	156
5.4 Qualitative analysis: The Interviews	157
5.4.1 Student Interviews	159
5.4.1.1 Harper Adams University	159
5.4.1.2 Keele University	163
5.4.1.3 Analysis of the student interviews	166
5.4.2 Staff Interviews	168
5.4.2.1 Harper Adams University Staff Portraits.....	169
5.4.2.2 Analysis of the Harper Adams Staff interviews.....	182
5.4.3.1 Keele University Staff Portraits	183
5.4.3.2 Analysis of the Keele Staff interviews	194
5.4.3.3 Analysis of the interviews between the two universities	196
5.5 National Student Survey (NSS) Analysis	197
5.6 Chapter Summary.....	203
Chapter 6: Discussion and Final Conclusions.....	205
6.1 Introduction	205
6.2 Evaluation of the Research design	205
6.3 Meeting the research aims and objectives	206
6.3.1 What is the structure and organisation of pastoral support and academic support in higher education institutions?	206
6.3.2 How do students engage with pastoral and academic support in the institutions?	206
6.3.2.1 Key Objective: Is pastoral support and academic support perceived as separate or combined?	209
6.3.2.2 Key Objective: Is it clear who students should go to for both pastoral and academic support?... ..	210
6.3.2.3 Key Objective: Are student perceptions of effectiveness and quality of provision correlated with the structure and organisation of how support is provided?	211
6.4 Contribution to the Sector	212
6.5 Key Recommendations	213
6.6 Summary.....	215
Addendum:	216
References	218
Appendices	232

List of Tables

Table 1. Themes and subthemes from interviews with personal tutors (McFarlane 2016).....	32
Table 2.Characteristics of at risk or vulnerable students (adapted with publishers' permission from Lochtie <i>et al</i> 2018)	39
Table 3. Advantages and potential problems of integrating personal tutoring into the curriculum (adapted from Stevenson 2009)	41
Table 4. HESA data by Institution Type (Institute of Fiscal Studies report 2018)	79

Table 5. HESA data on Keele University and Harper Adams University 2016-17	87
Table 6. The age range, gender and year of study of respondents at Harper Adams University and Keele University	125

List of Figures

Figure 1. The holistic and supportive model of personal tutoring (adapted from Lochtie <i>et al.</i> 2018) .	2
Figure 2. The process of developing a research study (adapted from Crotty 1998)	14
Figure 3. The Research Onion (Sanders <i>et al.</i> 2007)	15
Figure 4. Differing levels of commitment to student advising (McChlery and Wilkie 2009).....	20
Figure 5. The coaching approach and the 3 Cs in Personal Tutoring (MMU 2020)	27
Figure 6. Some ways mentors give support (adapted from Gravells and Wallace, 2007, p.12. 2nd edition).....	33
Figure 7. The four basic styles of helping (Klasen and Clutterbuck 2002).	35
Figure 8. Venn diagram of the interrelationship of risk factors (adapted from Lochtie <i>et al</i> 2018, p77.)	38
Figure 9. Engagement Analytics Diagram: Mutton (2012) reproduced from Lochtie <i>et al</i> 2018.	44
Figure 10. Office for Students framework (BIS 2016)	48
Figure 11. The NSS: Percentage of respondents who gave the two most positive answers (OfS 2019)	51
Figure 12. A comparison of key measures of wellbeing at UK universities (Neves and Hillman 2017).	57
Figure 13. Determinates of Wellbeing (adapted from Thorley 2017 Fig 2.1).....	58
Figure 14. Lifetime earnings for Men on graduate courses in HE (Fiscal Studies Report 2018).....	75
Figure 15. Lifetime earnings for Women on graduate courses in HE (Fiscal Studies Report 2018)	76
Figure 16. Student perception of university value for money 2007 – 2016 (Neves and Hillman 2016)	77
Figure 17. How fees are spent (Neves and Hillman 2016).....	78
Figure 18. The concurrent strategy of triangulation model (adapted from Cresswell 2003).....	101
Figure 19. Addressing the potential weaknesses of online surveys (Evans and Mathur 2005)	111
Figure 20. Gibbs reflective learning cycle (adapted from Gibb 1988)	119
Figure 21. All responses to Question 4. HAU	126
Figure 22. All responses to Question 4. Keele	126
Figure 23. All responses to Question 6. HAU	129
Figure 24. All responses to Question 6. Keele	129
Figure 25. Responses to Question 7: HAU	130
Figure 26. Responses to Question 7: Keele.....	131
Figure 27. *HAU: Use of support analysed by study year.....	132
Figure 28. Keele: Use of support analysed by study year	133
Figure 29. Question 7. Comparison of service use in both HAU and Keele	134
Figure 30. HAU: Perceived value of support (n = 84).....	135
Figure 31. Keele: Perceived value of support (n = 102)	136
Figure 32. Question 8: Comparison of the perceived value of support services use in both HAU and Keele	138
Figure 33. HAU: Would you use the service again? (n = 116).....	139
Figure 34. Keele: Would you use the service again? (n = 102)	139
Figure 35. HAU: Where else have you received support? (n = 34).....	140
Figure 36. Keele: Where else have you received support? (n = 55)	141

Figure 37. HAU: Are you clear about the difference between pastoral and academic support (n = 101)	142
Figure 38. Keele: Are you clear about the difference between pastoral and academic support (n =142)	142
Figure 39. NSS Question 12. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.	198
Figure 40. NSS Question 13. I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course.	199
Figure 41. NSS Question 14. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course.	200
Figure 42. NSS Question 21. I feel part of a community of staff and students.	201
Figure 43. NSS Question 27. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my course.	203

List of abbreviations

AA	Academic Advisers
AMOSSHE	The Student Services Organisation
BIS	Dept. for Business Innovation and Skills
FE	Further Education
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations
HAU	Harper Adams University
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Academy (now Advance HE)
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEPI	Higher Education Policy Institute
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
KU	Keele University
NACADA	The Global Community for Academic Advising
NSS	National Student Survey
NUS	National Union of Students
OfS	Office for Students
PGCertHE	Postgraduate Certificate of Education
SpLD	Special Learning Difficulties
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
THE	Times Higher Education
UKAT	UK Advising and Tutoring

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis critically examines the provision at two English universities for pastoral support and evaluates the student's perception of its value. The term pastoral support and care through the roles of various agencies within Higher Education Institutions (HEI) has many varied definitions within the literature. This research demonstrates that there is no clear division in the roles between academic and pastoral support and that in many cases for the students and staff, there is a close synergy in the provision.

It is important to consider the definitions of the commonly used terms; pastoral support and personal tutoring which are used within HE today. Other terms that are used, such as coaching and mentoring and their roles within the support process will be discussed in section 2.2.1.

The term personal tutor is used to identify the relationship based role, where a named member of staff, (academic or non-academic) is assigned to a student and supports the student through meetings to develop personal skills and nurture emotional well-being.

The role of the Personal tutor has been defined by Stork and Walker, (2015, p3) as

'one who improves the intellectual and academic ability, and nurtures the emotional wellbeing of learners through individualised, holistic support'

Whilst the job role of the individual supporting the student in the HEI may vary from academic staff allocated to students to specialist non-academic staff, what is important is that the person is suitable for the role, which is examined and discussed further in section 2.2

Appraisal of the individual support, advice and guidance to students at university is a key function of personal tutoring and how this is delivered, monitored and received by the students in the study

institutions will be critically analysed and evaluated. This is essential as the personal tutoring may also link the student to further support through the wider pastoral care provision at the HEI's in the research.

The diversification of HE and changes in the student culture has led to huge changes in the student-tutor relationship (Thomas 2006, Enders 2007, Morgan 2012, and Thomas *et al* 2015). This, combined with the increasing demands on academic staff to fulfil many demanding roles within their institution, has put huge pressures on staff and in student relationships and engagement.

As access and participation in HE have widened over the years, it is evident from studies e.g. Prebble *et al* (2004), that there has been a movement towards a more holistic approach to student support with more emphasis on guidance and additional support from a wide range of services now provided in HE.

The holistic and supportive model is advocated by Lochtie *et al* in their book on *Effective Personal Tutoring* (2018 p11).

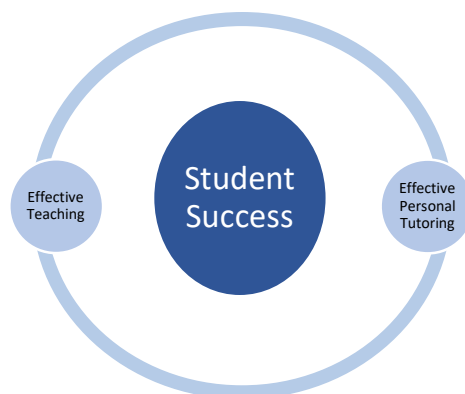


Figure 1. The holistic and supportive model of personal tutoring (adapted from Lochtie *et al*. 2018)

Effective student support is vital, whether through personal tutoring or wider pastoral support, for the wellbeing of the individual and also to ensure students can maximise their potential in their learning journey through Higher Education.

1.2 Contextualising the Research

1.2.1 The use of the terms 'Pastoral' and 'Personal' support and care

Pastoral care is a term that has its roots in Christianity with the role of the Pastor or Minister giving advice and counselling to members in the congregation.

Many Universities, Colleges and Schools in the UK use the term pastoral care. For example, the use of pastoral care and its links to the collegiate system at the early Universities, such as Oxford, Cambridge and Durham are well documented (Moore, 1968; Palfreyman, 2008). Cambridge University still use the term and state on their website¹

'Pastoral support for students is an essential component of collegiate life. It is delivered in different ways across the Colleges but your College is likely to have a number of people undertaking pastoral or welfare roles, such as a Senior Tutor, Tutors (or an equivalent role), Tutorial Office staff, College Nurse, Chaplain, and student JCR/MCR Welfare Officers. Some Colleges also have a College Counsellor and/or a Mental Health Advisor'.

The term 'Personal Care' is also now provided through the role of the 'Personal Tutor' where staff are assigned to support a number of students on a one to one basis through their university journey. However, both the terms 'Pastoral Care' and 'Personal Tutoring' are used interchangeably within the UK and therefore will be used in the same manner within this thesis. It is evident that most HEIs do not see a single role for pastoral care and that there is often a close link with the academic staff who

¹ <https://www.studentwellbeing.admin.cam.ac.uk/college-pastoral-support>

support students with their academic studies and also provide advice pastorally. This is why effective personal tutoring is essential in supporting students in their journey through HE as they are often the first person the student approaches if they have a problem, whether it is academic or personal.

Throughout this thesis the terms pastoral support and care and personal tutor will both be used in the context of supporting students primarily outside the specialist subject focused academic support.

For the purpose of this research, academic support will be defined as being about knowledge, learning, understanding (i.e. support from academic staff in subject areas and academic skills development) and course progression. Personal tutoring and pastoral support/ care will be defined as anything pertaining to wellbeing, e.g. developing an individual's personal growth and skills which can in turn, directly and indirectly affect academic performance. This includes issues such as health and wellbeing, personal relationships and social interaction, making the transition to university and living away from home, accommodation and financial concerns etc. It is important to note that personal tutors as the first point of contact, often deal with both academic and pastoral care and not just pastoral issues that affect the students' academic performance.

However, there are clear links between both academic and pastoral care, and it is not always clear as to the boundaries of who provides this support with many cases where the role of the personal tutor is both a subject specialist providing academic support as well as a role as personal tutor.

What appears to be paramount in the support process for students is the role of 'Facilitator'. This term will be used throughout this thesis as the person to whom the students' approach to seek support initially. This may take the form of an allocated personal tutor, course tutor or teaching staff that a student feels confident to discuss personal issues with. What also appears critical in the support process is that the students feel they have had effective support when needed and are directed to the further specialist support if necessary.

At the commencement of this thesis proposal in 2015, there was very limited research focussing on the effectiveness of pastoral care and the role of personal tutors. The lack of evidence-informed

practice and the significance of personal tutoring was presented in an article in the Times Higher Education by McIntosh and Grey (2017). The article also identified that tutoring is also '*chronically under-resourced and until now, neglected*'. Whilst there is a lack of evidence-based research in tutoring, there has however been a number of notable influential texts in the past which have been primarily aimed at advising and supporting staff in the role: Earwaker (1992), Wheeler and Birtle, (1993) Bell (1996), Thomas and Hixenbaugh (2006), Neville (2007), Wisker *et al* (2008), Morgan (2012), Stork and Walker (2015), and Mair (2016). A recent publication *Effective Personal Tutoring* in 2018 by Lochtie *et al* includes some of the work of these earlier authors and delivers a series of models for providing practical strategies for student support as well as helping students to become more independent and self-confident.

The personal tutoring system at any HEI (if present) forms part of the wider field of pastoral support or care systems including Student Services, Chaplaincy and other religious mentors, the Student Union, specialist support through counselling and mental health, careers guidance, student accommodation and other non-formal services that might be available, such as HE student buddy systems. The wider pastoral care system at the HEI may be able to support the students directly or may need to refer the students on to more specialist external services, for example, eating disorder clinics. For the purposes of clarity, the term 'personal tutor' will be used for the named person allocated to support the student whilst at University and the designation 'pastoral support' or 'pastoral care' for the wider support provision available to the students at the university.

Research by Grey and Lochtie (2016) for UK Advising and Tutoring association (UKAT) investigated the difference between personal tutoring and academic advising in the USA. Whilst the UK traditionally provides both personal and academic support using the term 'personal tutoring', the term academic advising is used in the USA. The NACADA (The Global Community for Academic Advising) survey by Carlstrom (2011) showed that 82% of US institutions have professional advisors, compared to the UKAT data which suggested the UK have only 41% of HEIs with staff involved in

professional advising. In the US, there seems a wider system of faculty academic advising with students contacted before they start their courses in order to build familiarity and relationships with staff. Evidence from Carlstrom's (2011) NACADA research, suggested a much wider role for academic advisors with staff helping students select modules and planning of their courses, which reflects the broader nature of many American HE courses. In the US, students may start on foundation programmes and there is more choice of core and elective modules before they enter their major course area. It was interesting to note from Grey and Lochtie's UKAT research in 2016, that whilst two thirds of respondents to their survey stated they were involved in goal setting as part of the personal tutoring process, achievement of the goals was not monitored by the HEI. It was also noteworthy that the UKAT study showed that around half of the respondent HEIs did not have a clearly defined and documented personal tutoring policy. The importance of a clear policy and framework with the University structure will be discussed further in section 2.1. The NACADA research also suggested that the students support system used in US universities has more structure compared to the UK, with increased student meetings where professional advisors were employed.

1.2.2 The issues surrounding pastoral support in Universities

The Higher Education Quality Council guidelines (HEQC, 1995) state that 'there should be access to reliable and valid academic advice and guidance services at all reasonable times, including regular access to a designated personal tutor/academic adviser able to offer information on programmes, specific subjects, student progress and referrals to other sources of advice'. The National Audit Office study (2002) showed that pastoral care was seen to vary widely both between and within HE institutions showing a variation in the quantity of time and quality of service provided by staff. An earlier HEQC study in 1994 noted that there appeared to be confusion about the division of labour between central and course-based assistance, a fact confirmed by the work of both Bell (1996) and Earwaker (1992). Bell (1996) suggested a number of models, including the separation of the role of

the academic tutor and the personal tutor, although alternatively the two roles could be merged. Studies by Christie *et al.* (2004) and Cooke *et al.* (2006) of the more vulnerable groups in HE noted that most students did not seek assistance within the university's counselling services. It is suggested by several researchers, for example by McChlery and Wilkie (2009) in the field of pastoral support, that student advising is weakened where accountability is shifted from academic staff to a 'Support Centre'. This is often perceived more impersonal to the student and exacerbated when at-risk students shun the confrontation of problems. This effectiveness may be influenced by the underappreciated role of individual academic support in also providing pastoral support at the same time.

Poor pastoral support not only impacts on the individual in terms of course retention, progression, success and self-esteem but also within the HEI itself in terms of quality assurance, reputation and financial penalties for students who leave courses early.

This effect has been highlighted by McChlery and Wilkie's research (2009, p.13):

'Academic failure brings with it emotional and financial issues for students, and resource and performance implications for educational establishments' (McChlery and Wilkie (2009).

Further issues around student problems requiring support services will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

Whilst there has been a great deal of research in the field of student progression in HE in relation to social, cultural and academic differences and the 'widening participation agenda', there appears to have been few research studies focussing on student support, the synergy between academic and personal assistance, its use and how this is actually perceived by the students themselves. It is also important to 'follow through' and determine the resolution of pastoral issues. The majority of Universities today focus much more on student's perceptions and feedback and widely use the term

‘the student voice’. HEIs such as University of Plymouth have a guide for staff² and stress the importance of responding to student’s feedback on all aspects of their university experience. This was reinforced is a speech given by John Peart (member of the NUS National Executive Council) at the National Union of Students (NUS) National Executive Council at the University of Portsmouth’s Learning and Teaching Conference in December 2009.

[Student voice] is important because universities are communities of learning.

That community is achieved through a partnership between staff and students and ...this opens up possibilities for authentic and constructive dialogue, offering the opportunity for more holistic and reflective feedback and enhancement of learning (Peart 2009)

The Student Voice can be achieved through many means such as internal and external surveys, module evaluations, course representatives and students’ membership at university boards. The role of the Students Union can be critical in supporting students to raise issues, concerns and suggest improvements as well as providing anonymous feedback mechanisms for students who do not want to be identified by fellow students, staff or the university.

1.2.3 The Charter on Personal Tutoring (NUS 15)

In 2015 the NUS created a Charter on Personal Tutoring, which outlines what students believe are the important principles of an effective tutoring process. The ten points from the Charter are listed below. This is important, as it gives the student view on personal tutoring which is a valuable consideration for this research study.

1. All students should be entitled to a named personal tutor
2. All students should meet their tutor at least once a term
3. Staff should be given full training on being an effective personal tutor

² <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/about-us/teaching-and-learning/guidance-and-resources/student-voice-a-guide-for-staff>

4. There should be an institution-wide procedure for personal tutoring (comparability of experience/minimum standards)
5. Staff and students should set mutual expectations
6. The personal tutoring system should be adaptable (tailored) to students' needs
7. Personal tutoring should support both academic and personal development
8. Understanding assessment feedback should be integrated into personal tutoring
9. Personal tutoring should be recognised in staff reward and recognition schemes
10. Personal tutoring should make full use of appropriate new technologies

(NUS 2015)

1.2.4 The Provision of pastoral care: current models and frameworks used in HE

Across UK Universities there are various models of pastoral care. Several come from a historic background of having staff allocated to support students within the collegiate system as with Oxford and Cambridge universities, whilst others offer a range of services provided centrally, or via allocated personal tutors or a combination of both. Some universities have developed systems which work for both their staff and students and it is evident from the range of various systems currently used (for example research by Stuart *et al* (2019)), that there is not a universal pastoral support system that would work for every HEI. The different support systems used by both the Universities in this research are detailed in Chapter 3, but it is evident through the work of the UK Advising and Tutoring association (UKAT) that many Universities are reviewing the effectiveness of their student support and undergoing change to meet the needs of students and the current widening participation agenda.

Research by Grey and Osbourne (2018) identified the lack of inquiry into the principles and models of personal tutoring in the UK. Their research evaluated the best practice models in the fields of student success, personal tutoring and the literature advising staff taking on the support roles. As

discussed earlier, the role of the personal tutor can be extremely broad and encompass many aspects of the student experience. This has been identified by Thomas (2006, 22) to include *‘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’*. It has been recognised by Wheeler and Birtle (1993) that a clear support system is needed for all students entering HE and not just those perceived to be at risk and that the system needs to be effective and accessible to all students. Miller (2016, p. 45) used the term for personal tutors as *‘cultural navigators’* who teach students to understand the language of Higher Education and *‘help them acclimatise to the (unfamiliar) academic environment’*. The pivotal role of personal tutors is also described by Wheeler and Birtle (1993, 3) as the *‘anchor on which the support system of the university rests’*. As reviewed earlier it is now well documented through research, the NSS and internal university monitoring, that effective personal tutoring is positively correlated with learning outcomes and overall student satisfaction with the education experience. Research by Leach and Wang (2015) suggest that students who receive good academic advice are twice as likely to thrive in their wellbeing. Whilst many universities are revising their support provision it would seem wise that the research outcomes from Grey and Osbourne (2018) are reviewed and integrated into any new framework or models within the university and that the NUS Charter for personal tutoring is incorporated into future HEI policy and practice.

1.2.4.1 Staff qualities and support meetings

Staff allocated as personal tutors have to present traits which are valued by the students and have been identified by researchers to include staff acting as an advocate, being empathetic, proactive, and 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 student's name (Ghenghesh 2017), and seeing each one as a unique individual (Barker and Mamiseishvili 2014).

Regular contact with a named staff member and formal structured meetings are also identified as an important part of any support framework success. The lack of engagement with personal tutors has been identified with issues identified such as students not understanding the purpose of the personal tutor role, intimidation, time issues, and lack of awareness as to the process of who they see and when is appropriate and booking systems to see staff etc. or the value of support staff can provide (Malik 2000, Stephen, O'Connell and Hall 2008, McClary *et al* 2011 and Gubby and Nicole 2013). The issue of providing mandatory or optional personal tutors meetings also needs to be considered and whilst as adults, students have the right to refuse support, initial mandatory meetings can sometime break the ice and let students see a familiar face and let them know that there is someone to support them if necessary in the future. The number of personal tutor meetings provided by the university, not surprisingly, has been found (Miller2016) to be positively linked to the students' perceptions' of a supportive university environment. Early face to face contact with allocated staff in the first few weeks, has been seen as essential to form the support network with new students (Robbins 2012). Whilst the role of personal tutors at university is seen mainly to support academic learning and subject specialism issues, it is evident that the familiarity with staff seen on a regular basis for teaching can be an effective platform for personal support and guidance.

As discussed previously the close synergy between personal support and academic support needs to be considered in the allocation of staffing within the support framework of the university. In taking on the multiple roles a personal tutor needs to address, it is essential that there is a clear process and signposting for staff to direct students to additional support and that staff observe boundaries and fully understand their part in the support process and their responsibilities.

The examples of models and frameworks currently in Universities and the more detailed role of the Personal Tutor will be discussed later in Chapter 2.

The research carried out by Grey and Osbourne (2018) involved a survey of 29 universities with responses from 48 staff. It was interesting that analysis of responses showed that staff were divided in the timing of support with no clear division of when the personal tutoring should be focussed. Thomas (2012) suggests that support should be focused on the transition period when entering university and during the first year but it is also evident from research that student can require support at other times in their education journey, perhaps in the final year and during periods of personal difficulties. The research also showed that evaluation of the effectiveness of personal tutoring is also important as well as some indication that pre-entry contact can help students feel welcome and familiar with staff supporting them. In addition, responses from the survey surprisingly showed that only a minority of staff felt that students should be allocated a personal tutor who teaches on their programme in the first year, which contradicts other research (Foster *et al* and Thomas 2012) which emphasise the student-tutor relationships and the sense of community and belonging when new to university. The majority of staff (71%) in the survey by Grey and Osbourne felt that personal tutoring should involve group tutorials but a third of respondents did not consider group tutorials to be appropriate. Responses to questions on the frequency of contact suggested four meetings per year although two was also advocated. The research shows a great disparity with the opinions of staff directly involved with personal tutoring and it is clear that whilst the 'not one size fits all' approach for models and frameworks within any HEI, there are some examples of good practice which Grey and Osbourne (2018) summarized in the lists below. This followed three themes: process, operation and delivery and responsibilities and expectations of personal tutors.

The personal tutoring process

1. The tutoring/advising process requires student engagement in an intentional and structured programme of meaningful activities
2. The tutoring/advising process has a clearly defined and published set of student (learning) outcomes
3. Tutoring/advising supports student academic, personal, and professional development
4. Tutoring/advising is personalised to the needs of individual students

5. Tutoring/advising involves (collaborative) goal/target setting, and monitoring of achievements against targets
6. 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
7. Tutoring/advising helps students understand and adjust to the differences between studying in higher education and studying at school/FE college
8. Staff and students set mutual expectations

The operation and delivery of personal tutoring

1. All students must have a tutor
2. Students are allocated a tutor who teaches them on their programme, ideally in the first year of the programme
3. Students retain the same tutor throughout their degree programme
4. Not all academic staff are required to act as personal tutors
5. Students are notified of the name of their tutor and given their contact details before they join the university
6. 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
7. 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
8. A defined schedule for meetings exists and is published to students. Tutor meetings should appear in students' timetable
9. Students meet tutors at least twice per semester, regardless of whether they feel they need the meeting
10. A nominated, experienced tutor (senior tutor) exists in each school/department.
11. The senior tutor should take responsibility for overseeing tutoring provision and tutor development in that school/department
12. The tutoring/advising process is continually evaluated to ensure that it is meeting its stated objectives

Responsibilities and expectations of personal tutors

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

(Adapted from Grey and Osbourne 2018)

1.3 The Research Philosophy

It is evident that there are critical realism aspects of pastoral care and in order to address these, various research methods are needed to answer the different research questions. Ontology is described by Crotty (1998) as the study of being, shaped by questions of the nature of reality and existence and the determination of what is real (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011). In the construction of meaning, ontological investigation is aligned with epistemological issues. Epistemology or what it means to know, is driven by ontology and examines the relationship between knowledge and the researcher. The question of truth (ontology) and gaining knowledge of what we know (epistemology) (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011) often converge and indeed merge together (Crotty 1998). Through the philosophy of critical realism, unobservable structures cause observable events and the social world can be understood through understanding the structures that generate the events. Applied to this research, the universities have formal policies that have been constructed by staff, with sometimes the support and input of the student body. It is the implementation of these policies and models (structures) and how they function effectively, that is critical for the students.

The mixed methods philosophy used in this research is shown in Crotty's (1998) conceptual model in Figure 2 and illustrates the process of developing a research study.



Figure 2. The process of developing a research study (adapted from Crotty 1998)

The framework of developing research is also detailed by Sanders *et al* (2007) with the Research Onion Model shown in Figure 3 which illustrates the layers of the onions representing the effective progressions through the research process.

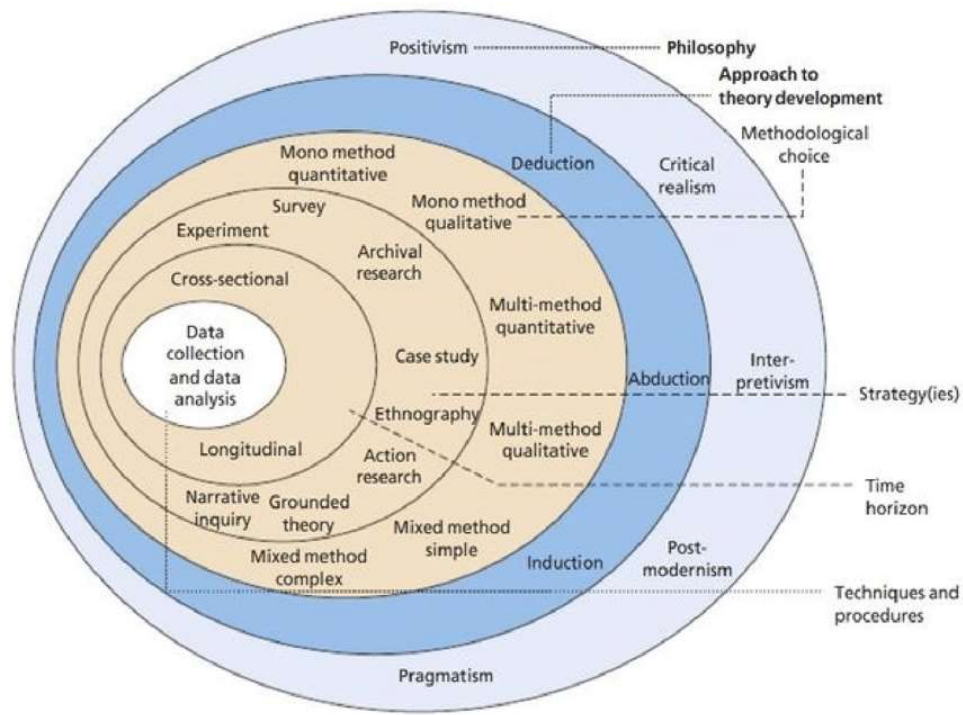


Figure 3. The Research Onion (Sanders *et al.* 2007)

As the model moves from the outer layers towards the centre, Saunders reviews the process as a distinct series of stages which need to be completed before proceeding inwards.

The outer layer of the onion indicates the research philosophy which determines the research methods and strategies to be adopted. The five main stages include the research philosophy, the research approach, the research strategies, the research choice and the research time horizon. The three main philosophies identified by Sanders *et al* (2007) are Ontology (which includes objectivism, constructivism and pragmatism), Epistemology (positivism, critical realism and interpretivism) and Axiology (understanding opinions). The rationale for the research philosophy, the approach, strategies and methodology are given in the following sections.

Bailey (1997) surmised that any process of systematic research is directed by a series of basic beliefs and values. These beliefs and values which shape the foundation of a research approach or theoretical and conceptual framework are designed in order to answer four questions:

1. “What is the nature of knowledge or reality” (Ontology)
2. “What is relationship between the researcher and knowledge”
3. “What constitutes adequate justification for knowledge?” (Epistemology)
4. “How should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge”? (Methodology)

(Adapted from Bailey, 1997).

The epistemological assumptions of this study must balance the suitability of analysing policy as something that is objective and which can be evaluated to produce results that are generalizable against the problems of assuming such objectivity in the face of intervening factors. The unique nature of how individuals perceive and interpret the world is particularly important in examining a policy from the view of the people upon whom it is applied and then those who are applying it (Mark *et al* 2000). Pastoral care cannot be conceived as an objective service that can be objectively measured to evaluate its success in the same way that the quality control of a manufactured product can be evaluated. Since this policy addresses the wider health and wellbeing of students, the individual perceptions of care by those students is one of the necessary outcomes of the policy. If students perceive it as a failure, then even if the objectives outcomes appear positive, the service will have failed in an important aspect of its delivery (Stuart *et al* 2019). The critical realist approach, which adopts these particular assumptions about the importance of the individual perceptions in its epistemology, is well suited to the nature of this policy and evaluating its implementation. The research methods that will be employed, will utilise both qualitative and quantitative approaches to data gathering and analysis. The project involves two case studies that employ large surveys, focus groups, and individual, in-depth interviews with beneficiaries and stakeholders in order to gather opinions and experiences at the local level, rather than producing large, aggregate, quantitative datasets (Bachtler and Wren 2006). However, within each of these institutions, the research will gather survey data from students from as broad a sample as possible as well as conducting more in-depth focus groups and interviews to get a better sense of how their views, which are reflected in the surveys, are constructed and experienced.

This project will include a post-positivist approach to studying the design and implementation of pastoral care and comparing it to student perceptions of its provision and efficacy. The post-positivist approach for the research design situates empirical inquiry in a broader, more interpretive framework. Fischer (1998) considers that more than just an epistemological alternative, the approach is offered as a better description of what social scientists actually do in practice.

Positivism simplistically presupposes that data results are good quality and adequate if they can be quantified (Adam 2013). Many Positivist researchers in social science believe that they can reach a full understanding based on experiment and observation. Concepts and knowledge are held to be the product of straightforward experience, interpreted through rational deduction (Ryan 2006). The positivist position is grounded in the theoretical belief that there is an objective reality that can be known to the researcher, if she or he uses the correct methods and applies those methods in a correct manner. Post-positivism distinguishes itself through its recognition of the complexity of a world in which people's views and the meaning of events are socially constructed. Post-positivism accepts multiple methodological approaches and research strategies, particularly the mixed method research proposed for this investigation. Triangulation or the integration of different methods, and further meta-analyses and other combinations of quantitative and qualitative methods typify the approach of post-positivism. This project assumes that the provision of pastoral care is a policy that can be systematically evaluated and analysed in a way that can inform better student outcomes in universities. The use of an online survey for this research will provide broad information about student's engagement with pastoral support services and their perception of its value. The use of focus groups and interviews with semi structured questions for both students and staff, allows a more in-depth evaluation of the key issues in pastoral care provision and delivery.

1.4 The Research for this thesis

As mentioned previously, there is limited research in this area of pastoral care in HE. Most appear to have been undertaken in situ within the HEI for the purpose of informing policy and practice. Most of the research on this area is more concerned with student retention and outcomes and it often only indirectly addresses pastoral support.

Research by key authors such as Dodgson and Bolam (2002), Yorke and Thomas (2003), Yates and James (2006), Wilcox *et al* (2006), Yorke and Longden (2008) and Davies (2010) have all been influential in improving knowledge and understanding in the field of pastoral support. These research studies have used a variety of research methods in order to analyse the topics and questions, although most use a mixed method approach. The research field of these studies surrounding pastoral care analyse the macro level about HEIs provision, policy and practice and the micro level by using focus groups and interviews to determine and evaluate ‘the student experience’ of that care and support.

The research project most closely aligned to this research project is a large study undertaken by Yorke and Longden (2008), who sampled 7,000 respondents from a variety of institutions and focussed on the student experience in year one and the reasons why students withdrew from their courses in year 2 (Level 5). Whilst this research provided a large amount of data from year 1 (Level 4) students on both academic and personal issues it was limited in terms of the student’s personal engagement with support and advice. In contrast, this research will examine all years within in HEI and will not consider retention and progression rates but will focus more closely on examining the student’s perception of resources in their HEI and the relationship between pastoral support and academic support. The investigation will analyse how students perceive that pastoral support is provided by the institution and the extent to which this support overlaps and is conflated with more traditional academic support. The role of academic support staff in providing pastoral care may have a strong impact upon students’ general wellness as well as their perceptions of the quality of

their course rather than the more frequently researched outcomes of progression and retention. McChlery and Wilkie (2009) carried out one of the few studies to directly consider pastoral care for undergraduates. They used action research methodology to evaluate an initiative to support students in their HEI. Many of the components of their research have informed this study and their conclusions suggest that the forms of institutional support are directly linked to the quality of student outcomes. This will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

Identification of students 'at risk' is a complex area of study in itself and research on this area suggests that pastoral care is a key element, though the research rarely studies it directly. Johnson (1994) suggested disengagement in academic life is a profound indicator of a student experiencing problems and requiring guidance and support. McChlery and Wilkie (2009) suggest prominent categories more likely to contain students 'at risk': those in transition from other forms of education, students entering education through widening access routes, poor attenders, those entering through clearing and those with personal problems. Moxley *et al.* (2001) advise that there should be recognition of students 'at risk' and appropriate advisers to support these students in their development and retention. However, this process also involves identification of potential problems **before** direct action is required, and many students who experience pastoral support problems are not necessarily those who could be initially identified and targeted at being 'at risk'. Blythman and Orr (2003) also suggested that support mechanisms should reach the entire student body and this could be accomplished by supporting all new entrants effectively. Support mechanisms for all students that recognise problems before they arise, suggest an integrated level of pastoral support within the HEI. The various approaches of different institutions to providing students support will deliver varying levels of pastoral care in different ways, and their effectiveness will be further explored in this research.

Unlike many of the other research studies in pastoral support, which seem to focus primarily on retention and progression as a results of support, the work of McChlery and Wilkie 2009 also

included a survey of 58 students to gain an insight into their perceptions of the support system provided. It was clear from the research that the students felt strongly there was an advantage to have a familiar member of staff as the point of contact when they needed support or advice. Staff involved in the support initiative indicated that, whilst they liked getting to know their students better, the demand on staff time was excessive. For some students, the support was not only about providing advice and professional guidance for further support, it was also about reassurance that the students were contented, progressing and coping with HE life and the academic demands of independent learning. These results clearly demonstrate that pastoral care is occurring alongside academic advising and that the two are not so easily separated.

Figure 4 shows the different levels of institutional commitment identified by McChlery and Wilkie (2009) that were considered for student advising in relation to the cost/benefit pay offs. These different types of support structures will help to inform and guide the mapping of institutional support in this project. Other research also agrees with the findings that support structures are not developing rapidly to meet demand (Davy *et al.*, 2000) whilst the matching of resourcing to such structures cannot be ignored (Trotter and Roberts, 2006).

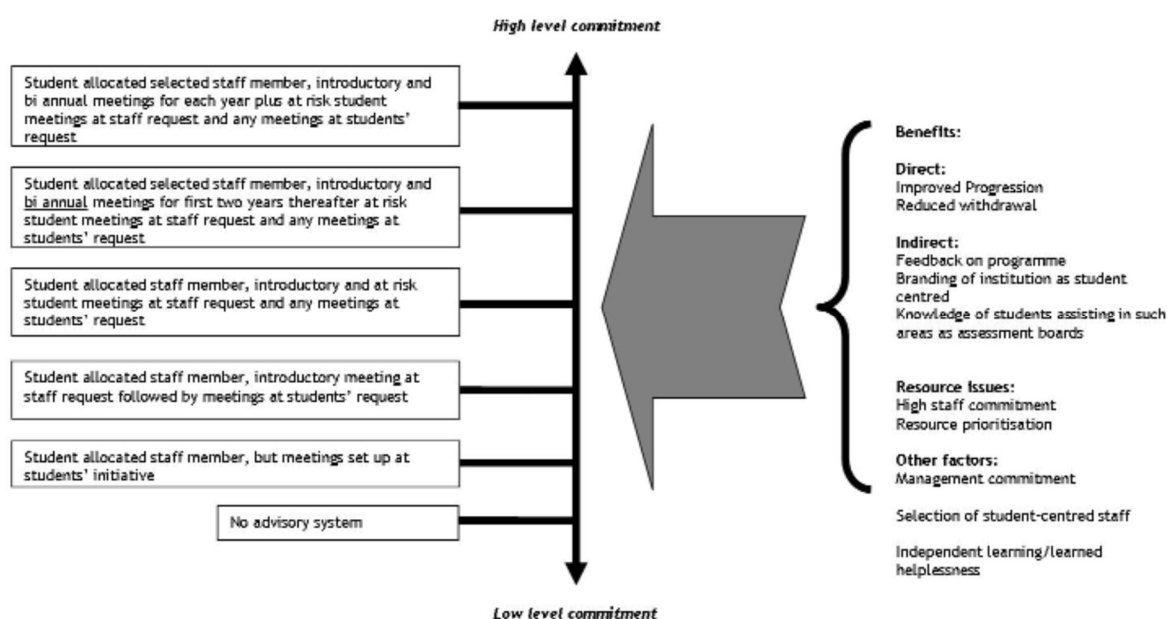


Figure 4. Differing levels of commitment to student advising (McChlery and Wilkie 2009)

What this model clearly shows is the impact of low level commitment of staff that are not proactive in supporting students but waiting for students to approach them with problems. This raises many questions about student communication with staff and lack of availability and accountability of academics. Making personal tutor meetings mandatory and scheduled ensures that that the service is provided in line with the university models and the HEI framework.

Much of the early research and publications were focussed on advice and support for personal tutors in HE: Books by Earwaker (1992), Bell (1996), Thomas and Hixenbaugh (2006), Wisker *et al* (2008) and Morgan (2012) and some doctorate research at both HE and FE level by Huyton (2011) and Furey (2014).

1.4.1 Historical perspective of pastoral care in UK Universities

Until the last 15 years the characterisation of pastoral care and personal tutoring have been unclear. The use of the term 'Personal Tutor' has been more widely used with both Further and Higher Education but a clear indication of both the role and responsibility has been unclear and little researched, especially with regards to effectiveness in supporting students (Grant 2006; Walker 2018).

Personal tutoring has been defined by both Thomas (2006) and Walker (2018) in terms of good practice as *'one who improves the intellectual and academic ability and nurtures the emotional wellbeing of learners through individualised, holistic support'* (Stork and Walker, 2015, p3)

What these definitions acknowledge is that personal tutoring may include some form of academic support either as a stand- alone support service or in addition to the more emotional support that student's need. It raises the question about academic staff providing both services and the allocation of academic staff to the roles of personal tutor considering their willingness to take part in more personalised support and their own expertise.

Academic feedback and development encompasses the support for study skills and other learning development activities to maximise learning which includes specialist subject matter support from academic staff for the taught elements of the students course, (Myers, 2008; Stephen *et al*, 2008; Smith, 2008; Robinson, 2012; Small, 2013; Yale, 2017). Personal welfare support encompasses advising, informing and supporting more personal or pastoral needs (Kuhn, 2008; Smith, 2008; Robinson 2012; Small, 2013; Gubby and McNab, 2013).

Both academic and more personalised pastoral support may include both target setting and monitoring of achievements (Wooton, 2007; Braine and Parnell, 2011; Ross *et al*, 2014; Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011; Ghenghesh, 2017; Calcagno *et al*, 2017) and solution – focussed coaching where a student can be more formally supported to realise their own potential and become more effective independent learners (Whitmore, 2002; Kuhn, 2008; Palmer and Szymanska, 2008; Garbutt and Garbutt, 2015; Thomas *et al*, 2015; Raiston and Hoffshire, 2017).

It was evident at the onset of this research, that UK tutoring has been persistently under-resourced and until recently, very little researched with regards to evidence – informed practice and dissemination of good effective tutoring in HE. In 2002, Longden’s research raised the question

‘If the higher education system has become more inclusive, to what extent have institutions changed to accommodate, to manage this inclusive student expectation’?

Much of the recent research, evidence-lead practice and dissemination through annual conferences has been achieved by UK Advising and Tutoring association (UKAT). UKAT³ is *‘a body of professional practitioners and researchers interested in all aspects of students advising and personal tutoring in Higher Education in the UK. UKAT promotes student success by advancing the field of student advising and tutoring in the UK and beyond. We provide opportunities for professional development, networking and leadership for our diverse membership’*

³ <https://www.ukat.uk/>

Founded in 2015, UKAT is allied to NACADA, a global community for academic advising based in North America and through their mission statement state; *'For too long, personal tutoring and academic advising have not been given the attention they deserve in UK institutions. UKAT aims to redress this situation, offering professional development and training in this vital area, providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and working to ensure that tutors and advisers receive the respect they deserve'*.

Through research and conference papers at UKAT, there has been a wealth of very valuable evidence that have both initiated research, reinforced effective tutoring and informed good practice across many HE institutions. McIntosh and Grey (2017) have summarised 10 top tips for Effective Personal Tutoring (available on the UKAT website), which has provided a useful platform for discussion and review at a time when many UK HE institutions, focussing on the TEF, are currently reviewing the organisation and effectiveness of their own tutoring systems.

1.4.2 An outline of the research questions and methodology

The research aim of this study is to evaluate the range of pastoral support provided by Universities and to ascertain its value and use by students at all levels in their study programmes.

The primary research objectives are listed below in the form of two principal questions and three subsidiary questions. Each objective will be used to analyse the provision and evaluate the perceived effectiveness in each HEI. The outcomes of the research will then be reviewed in line with both the individual institutional practice and the current research in the field of pastoral care. Two Universities were selected for this research: Harper Adams University (HAU) where the researcher is a Senior Lecturer and Senior Tutor and Keele University (KU), which provides the EdD research programme. Details of both these higher education institutions are given in Chapter 3.

In order to achieve the research aim and objectives, the following key questions will be addressed

1. What is the structure and organisation of pastoral support and academic support in higher education institutions?
2. How do students regard pastoral and academic support in the institutions with particular regard to:
 - I. Is pastoral support and academic support perceived as separate or combined?
 - II. Is it clear who students should go to for both pastoral and academic support?
Who is the facilitator?
 - III. Are student perceptions of effectiveness and quality of provision correlated with the structure and organisation of how support is provided?

The methodology will be described in more detail in Chapter 3, but the study utilises student and staff interviews, focus groups and an online survey in the two Universities in this research: Harper Adams University and Keele University. Scoping student support provision will also be undertaken to evaluate the range of services available to help the students whilst at university.

1.4.3 Outcomes from this research

This research project has the potential to make a distinct contribution to the knowledge and understanding of pastoral care provision, its role and its effectiveness in HE. The research will help inform policy and practice and further emphasise and support the research of others about the significance of pastoral support and gain a wider recognition for its value and importance to students in HE. The research findings as well as educating and informing a wider audience as to the status and issues surrounding pastoral support, will also provide a platform to develop and take this research further in understanding the links between different models of support provision and student outcomes. Student support and progression, particularly in the context of increased student fees, debt and graduate employability, have become significant issues in Universities today and will grow in importance in the future. The wider use of central recording of student data is also an important factor which will be discussed later in the final chapter.

1.5 Chapter Summary

This Chapter has provided an outline of the purpose and rationale of this research and detailed the complex nature of defining and implementing pastoral support. It also examines the issues involved in pastoral support, the outline frameworks for the provision of support, the monitoring of student progression as well as the role of external agencies in influencing policy and practice.

1.6 Thesis Outline

This thesis is presented as a record of the research process used to investigate the student perception of the effectiveness of pastoral support in their university. Chapter One has outlined the purpose of the research with details on the contextualisation and philosophy of the research as well as some initial indication of others research in this field.

Chapter Two will consider in more detail the various models and frameworks of pastoral care provision in UK Universities and the role of the personal tutor. The issues faced by students and feedback from other research in higher education will be examined in detail and will provide the framework to establish the research parameters for this study. Chapter Three is a scoping process to give more detail to the nature and structure of the two Universities in this research study. It will detail how the process of student support works in each institution, which will again help support the research process and the analysis of the findings. Chapter Four details the methodology and methods of the research to enable the research aims and objectives. Chapter Five will present the findings from the data analysis in methodological sequence, the online surveys, the focus groups and student and staff interviews at both universities. Chapter Six concludes the thesis summarising the outcomes from the research in both universities, the contribution of the research findings to the student support sector and making recommendations for future research in this area.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Much of the literature on pastoral care and personal tutoring comes out of studies of particular university interventions. Many of the conclusions note the advice given in the public policy design and implementation literature around clearly communicated aims and staff support on policies.

Whilst some of the literature pertinent to this research has been mentioned in the introduction with regards to defining and contextualising personal tutoring and its importance in HE, it is also essential to evaluate the other elements and issues in the personal tutoring system and the underpinning research. The themes that the literature on personal tutoring primarily feature the exploration of issues, rather than identify topics that need to be evaluated. There are both extrinsic factors such as institutional frameworks and the role of personal tutors and internal influences from the students themselves that need to be evaluated.

2.1 Examples of Models and Frameworks in Universities

It is essential, in order to gain a clearer understanding of the nature of university support, to review the delivery structure of the pastoral care provision (model) and how it is integrated into the organisational and curricular system (framework) in the HEI. There is wide variability in the provision of personal support amongst UK universities (Ridley, 2006; Grey and Lochtie, 2016). Some of the variability may be due to size of the institution, the nature of courses, the mix of students, staff availability and the level of part time and commuter students on courses. Older universities in the British system have a long history of personal tutoring which informs both their culture and organisational provision of this service. It is useful therefore to look at some examples of practice at some other universities in the UK and review their practices to help evaluate the provision of the universities in this research.

One university contacted for this research, which wanted to remain anonymous, stated that different departments within the university have different models of support. In their own

department, they had developed a hybrid system and have moved away from personal tutors and that academic staff were only available to provide academic advice and support. A central bank of support services using 'Student Progression Administrators' who act as the initial support for the students and work alongside specialist wellbeing and mental health specialists. Students' self-refer but academic staff can signpost students to personal support if they feel they require it, but do not provide any mentoring, advice or counselling services for personal issues.

Many universities outline their support provision and policy on their websites for students to review.

Manchester Metropolitan University⁴ (MMU) outline the role of their personal tutors below with the activity being actioned through the coaching process.



Figure 5. The coaching approach and the 3 Cs in Personal Tutoring (MMU 2020)

The 3 Cs identified by MMU of Course, Community and Career address the coaching approach to personal tutoring which is both holistic and fully addresses the student needs. Whilst MMU use the term 'coaching' for their support delivery by personal tutors, there are many forms that support can take.

Sheffield Hallam University have a support system model identified by Jacobi (2020). (Pers. Comm.

M Jacobi: Lead for Academic Advising for Sheffield Hallam University) called the Students Support

Triangle which includes:

- Academic Advisers (academics from the students taught course)
- Student Support Advisers (who provide pastoral support and guidance) and

⁴ https://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/personal_tutoring/index.php

- Employability Advisers (who support job searching, CV development etc.).

This model it is replicated across the university with an underpinning Academic Advising Framework that provides an overview of the purpose and remit of academic advising, which includes identifying that students should have contact with their Academic Adviser (AA) a minimum of three times a year and ideally the AA will stay with their students for the duration of their studies. Academic advising models are then implemented in the most appropriate way at a Dept./course/subject group level (Pers. comm. M. Jacobi March 2020). It is interesting to note that all students at Sheffield Hallam University (approximately 32,000) are allocated a named member of staff for each role; Academic Advisor, Career Advisor and a Students Support Advisor. Whilst engagement with the Academic Advisor and Career Advisor is mandatory for all students, it is recorded approximately 20% - 30% of students will see their Support Advisor for help at some time during their time at the university. Like many Universities, the University of Portsmouth⁵, produces policy documents outlining the roles and responsibilities of both students and staff in the support process. There are also specific documents for staff indicating where to signpost students for additional support if necessary⁶ Newcastle University⁷ also produce an outline of the framework for personal tutoring and the importance of an effective framework will be examined later in this thesis.

Research by Calcagno *et al* (2017) at the University of Hull evaluated a revision in 2015 on the University's policy on personal tuition. The necessity for a revision of policy arose as a result of concerns expressed from the Student Union, the NSS and the UK engagement surveys. The aim of the revised policy was to provide improved student experience and address some of the key issues relating to personal tutoring. The revised approach to personal tutoring was to provide a clear boundary (as identified by Earwaker 1992) between academic and pastoral support with students

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https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/2/2452/PERSONAL_TUTORING_POLICY_2016_UPDATE.pdf

⁶ https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/10/10504/PT_Staff_Guide_Sept_18_.pdf

⁷ <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/assets/documents/qsh-personaltutoring-fwk.pdf>

being referred to specialist services for pastoral care. Academic tutors remain responsible for monitoring the students' academic and personal progress and ensuring the development of professional skills. Delivery of this support requires personal tutors to deliver a minimum of two individual and two group meetings per semester of a degree programme. The pilot project at Hull ran for one academic year with a focus on *'support on student transition, attainment and enhancement of graduate attributes'*. This pilot Hull project was informed by the 'What Works' project (Thomas 2012) and the HERE Toolkit (Foster *et al.* 2012). There were mixed responses to the pilot with a suggestion that small group environment meetings were more favoured by the students than specific tutorial activities and that students valued meeting other students in an informal group to form better peer support relationships. Staff at the University of Hull delivering the support appeared to be less positive, finding difficulty in delivering the non-discipline activities to be challenging. The research also shows that staff found it difficult to run student support workshops outside their own familiar subject disciplines and in some ways may suggest that these are better provided by trained staff in this area of support.

An action research project by Stuart *et al* (2019) at the University of Cumbria in 2016 investigated the practice and delivery of personal tutoring at the HEI and reflected on the HEI policy on support. This policy was due for review in 2018. Through interviews with staff, the multifaceted role of the personal tutor was identified and it was evident from abductive analysis (cause and effect) that there was a *'lack of clarity about who did what at the University of Cumbria and that protocols and boundaries needed to be established and implemented'* (Stuart *et al* 2019). A lack of guidance and a variety of personal tutor and student expectations was evident from the research. There was a lack of information sharing and recording which allowed no monitoring or clear understanding of the efficacy of the personal tutoring system at the university. The inconsistent range of practices was identified and a range of recommendations were made. These included better information for staff and students, a training package for all staff, enhanced data collection on personal tutoring and raising the status and value of personal tutoring within the university.

It therefore appears from this research and that of others in this field, that any change to students support policy at a university needs staff to fully understand why the policy is changing and how it is improving the student's experience whilst at university.

2.2 The Role of the Personal Tutor

The often complex and confusing definitions surrounding Personal Tutoring and Pastoral Support/Care have been examined earlier at the start of this thesis. It is therefore useful to now explore the literature on how the support is delivered from the tutor's perspective with some insight into the division of roles and responsibilities.

It is impossible however, to examine student's perception of pastoral support without further examining the complex role of the Personal Tutor. Wooten (2006) identified that tutors are expected to act as the conduit between the students, the curriculum and the pastoral support available at their HEI and within this role, create the sense of belonging and membership of a community, so important in the student's first year of study (Evans, 2013; Tinto. 1987; Yorke and Longden, 2004). Neville (2007: p9) used the term university '*representative*' indicating the key role of personal tutors and identified the large number of responsibilities they hold including supporting transition to university and between levels, discussing academic progress, encouraging engagement with extra-curricular opportunities, monitoring attendance, being the first point of contact for academic and personal difficulties, providing guidance and signposting to appropriate support services and offering one-to-one or group meetings on a regular basis. Personal tutors are often faced with challenging and distressing circumstances faced by students and shared with staff, which raises many questions concerning the confidence and competence of staff to undertake the tutoring role. The lack of training for staff and need to gain experience and have access to support have been raised by several researchers (Owen 2002; Race 2010 and Watts 2011) who also identify diverse perceptions of the role and a clear understanding of what supporting students effectively entails. The lack of time allowed for the support role and the impact of feelings of being overwhelmed taking on the

personal tutoring role, has led to some new staff feeling guilty about being unable to give the support necessary (Barlow and Antoniou, 2007; Owen, 2002; Myers 2008 and Watts 2011).

Research by Gardner and Lane (2010) undertook an auto ethnographic analysis which supported earlier work by Stephen *et al* (2008) and Luck (2010) and identified that personal tutors sometimes felt anxious, exhausted and unable to deal with students demands when faced with challenging, often upsetting situations disclosed by the student. This is reinforced by Watts (2011) that *'lack of supervision, support and training when dealing with intense personal issues and the importance of boundary setting'* can have a major impact on staff wellbeing. It is evident that a formal system of co-ordinated training and support is essential, and that staff should have an experienced mentor to help with difficult situations. With the increased pressure on academic staff to fulfil many roles in their HEI, it is necessary that clear framework structures are provided (Stevenson 2009) and that staff should be allowed specific time on their workloads for personal tutoring. Research by McFarlane (2016) at Staffordshire University interviewed eight personal tutors who supported on average 40 tutees, both undergraduate and postgraduate. Key themes and subthemes were created from the analysed interview scripts and are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes and subthemes from interviews with personal tutors (McFarlane 2016)

(Reproduced with permission by Sage Publishing).

Themes	Sub themes
Factors which affect perceived confidence and competence	Development within role Impact of previous experience Role confusion Workload Gaps in support and guidance Tutors own perceived hindrances
Approaches within a personal tutoring interaction	Signposting Non-directive Directive
Support needed by students	Reassurance Levels of support needed
Emotional response to personal tutoring	Guilt Satisfaction Anxiety Is personal tutoring valued?
Strategies to move forward	Training Dialogue with colleagues Other

It is interesting to note from the research by McFarlane (2016) that six of the eight tutors felt the personal tutor's role lacked clarity and that the large numbers of students affected their ability to fulfil the roles as expected. Staff suggested more current training, mentoring and updates as well as group meetings to share experiences would be useful support for personal tutors. The research also highlighted the impact of the demands from the diverse range of students now entering HE and the effect of high maintenance or 'needy' students on staff time and emotional energy. In comparison, looking at the US literature and research provided by NACADA, it is evident that in the American system the academic advising process should provide 'outcomes'. An article by Rose (2020) in the NACADA online journal Academic Advising Today, suggests a wider approach to academic advising to make the links of support more closely aligned to the curriculum outcomes. In the UK, the role of pastoral support is not often linked and integrated into the HE curriculum framework. This will be discussed further in section 2.2.5

In selection of staff for personal tutoring roles, it is interesting to note that Coventry University have introduced a system of specialised personal tutors who are selected by competitive applications. These academic staff receive extras workload compensation for undertaking their additional duties (Jones and Cashian 2019).

In addition to the formal, more familiar roles of academic staff supporting students, it essential to consider that there are other critical elements and roles contained within the ‘umbrella’ term of pastoral or personal care with HE. It is therefore important to examine and evaluate how these roles support the students and can be effectively delivered within the HE setting.

2.2.1 Coaching and Mentoring

It is important to understand the terminology currently used in student support and to clarify how these roles can function effectively at a university level.

Clutterbuck (1985), cited by Gravells and Wallace (2007) developed the mentor support structure given below in Figure 6.

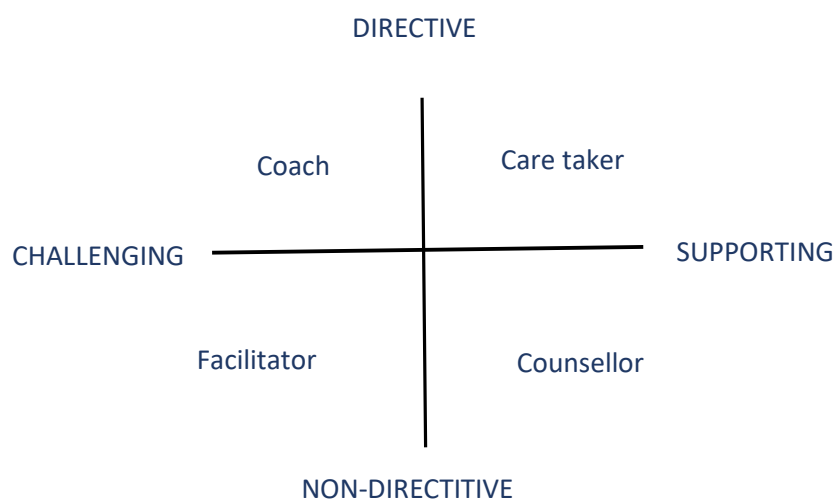


Figure 6. Some ways mentors give support (adapted from Gravells and Wallace, 2007, p.12. 2nd edition).

An effective mentor is defined as a person who understands that their role is to be dependable, engaged and authentic and tuned to the needs of the mentee. This effectively is the personal tutor engaging with the student.

From Figure 6, it can be seen that the role of the coach through the coaching process is directive and challenging. By setting targets and outcomes, the student is challenged through support to make changes. In the role of Counsellor, Gravells and Wallace (2007) identified the position as primarily a listening passive role for the students to express concerns etc. This role is non-directive and supporting. A Facilitator is dealing with a situation which has already been identified by the student and this role could be regarded as a facilitator in terms of passing on information where the students can gain more targeted, specialist support. The role of Caretaker is both supporting and directive and is used to address a personal need and may involve the mentor actually taking the student for targeted support to ensure they attend. This analysis suggests the role of caretaker might encompass the specialist support roles such as mental health counselling.

Research by Eleyan and Eleyan (2011) investigated the roles of coaching, tutoring and mentoring on student retention rates in Jordan. Coaching was identified as a process to support students primarily with academic support and developing specific skills. Tutoring was recognised as more of a counselling role supporting students more with personal issues such as poor self-esteem and is comparable to the Caretaker model of Clutterbuck (1985). Mentoring was perceived to be engaging with the students to become more self-reliant, independent learners.

It is therefore evident that the personal tutor may fulfil many roles at different times, depending on the circumstances, and therefore needs an abundance of skills to be effective in their capacity in supporting students, whether academic or personal support or both. Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) developed a more detailed method of support model following the earlier model by Clutterbuck (1985).

Figure 7 illustrates the juxtaposition of roles with regards to being active or passive in engagement and relating these to directive, non-directive, stretching or nurturing student requirements.

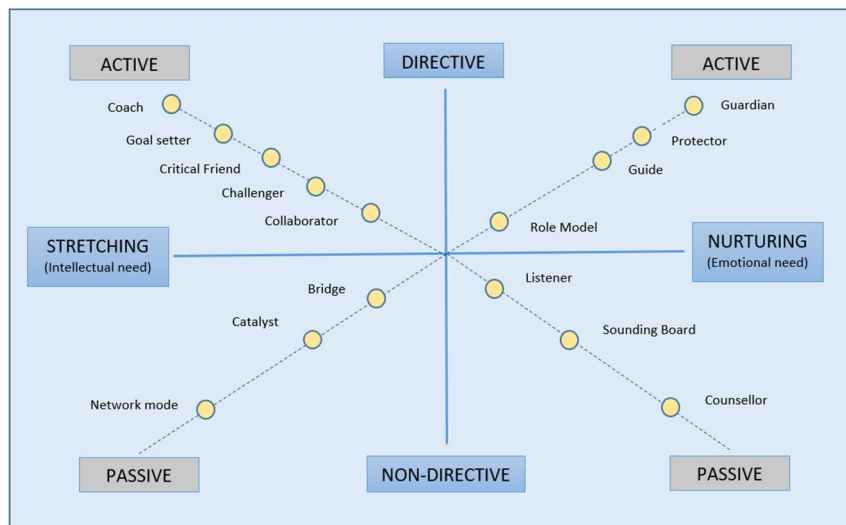


Figure 7. The four basic styles of helping (Klasen and Clutterbuck 2002).

Adapted from Gravells and Wallace 2007, p14. 2nd Edition.

Figure 7 provides a useful, subjective indication of the nature of the different support roles, approaches and their relationship to the active and passive processes. For example, *coaching* is both a highly active engaging process, which is also directive and provides an intellectual need. In contrast, a *listener* is a lower level engagement activity which is passive, non-directional and addresses emotional needs. These various types of support can be delivered, subject to the skills of the tutor, depending on the situation and the needs of the student.

2.2.2 Staff training and development

With the changing needs of both Higher Education and students entering university, it is evident that staff, particularly academics unfamiliar with pastoral supporting roles, need access to both mentors for advice and also appropriate training of skills that are current in the ever shifting HE environment. Whilst many new academic staff entering HE will be required to undergo mandatory training for a Postgraduate Certificate of Higher Education (PgCert HE) there seems little evidence that staff in HE

who have any responsibility for pastoral care have to undergo any training for the role. Whilst there is limited training offered at many universities, it appears that this is optional and the staff guidance is often via a guidance workbook which is used by staff for signposting students to other support if necessary.

Ideally, it would be useful for staff taking on pastoral care not only to receive mandatory training and a mentor for their first year, but also receive some student feedback on their role which would become part of staff performance appraisals, although the subjective nature of the student feedback needs to be considered. This also raises the problem of staff who do not want or are unsuitable for the taking the responsibility for pastoral care provision at their HEI. Should all staff, even if known to be unsuitable, be made to take on the role when the students allocated to them are not only missing out on potential support they need, but are also seeking alternative support elsewhere which puts an additional time burden on already busy staff? These are some issues which will be investigated further through the research for this work. Clearly for the pastoral tutor role, the basic abilities of being a good listener and possessing some level of empathy are essential, it is also important that staff are aware of their responsibilities and issues they might face with students.

2.2.3 Relationships and boundaries

It is important to examine how the relationship of staff with students can influence the outcomes not only for the students but for the staff themselves.

Research by Braine and Parnell (2011) and Small (2013) has shown that the quality of the relationship between personal tutor and students can have a positive effect on the student's learning and progression in HE. The focus on creating a healthy rapport between tutor and student has been shown to help enthusiasm, motivation and in the development of resilience and self-supporting skills. Relationships should be '*close, supportive, personal, safe, confidential, trusting and empowering*' (Stephen *et al*, 2008; Small 2013; Calcagno *et al*, 2017; Thomas *et al*, 2017b).

Developing the expertise of effective rapport with students is a skill that often develops over time

and with experience, as different situations arise, the rapport will change and evolve to support the individual's needs more effectively.

Situations which may be challenging for the tutor e.g. students presenting with challenging mental health problems, stress or experiencing severe personal problems such as abuse need to be managed carefully. The boundaries and level of support available between tutor and student need to be made very clear from the onset and in place prior to the meeting and applies to both parties. Establishing boundaries not only protects and prevents staff advising students inappropriately and referring students on to specialist support but also avoids over-dependency from the students seeing their tutor as the only form of support. It can be difficult for students who have finally found the support from someone they can talk to, to then be signposted to further specialist support and may sometimes feel 'fobbed off' or abandoned by the HE system they are in. Personal Tutors, who are also heavily involved in the teaching of individual students or supervision for research, may feel an over investment in their support, resulting in over familiarity and potential conflict in relationships. It is also important when staff, whether personal tutors or specialist support staff, deal with students with distressing or emotional circumstances that they also get support themselves for their own emotional well-being (Small 2013). Guidance with the do's and don'ts for personal or pastoral care needs to be very clear to all staff taking on the role when engaging with students and the policy and practice within the institution must be closely monitored if both students and staff are to be effectively supported and protected.

2.2.4 At risk students

The wellbeing of 'at risk' students is of increasing concern in higher education today and needs to be considered when evaluating effective personal tutoring. The term identifying students 'at risk' was first used in a 1983 article published by the U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education in a study: *A Nation at Risk*. Whilst the reports focus was primarily on the declining standards of US education, it also recognised that some students were vulnerable in the education system and that

the characteristics of 'at risk' or 'vulnerable' students needed to be identified. Widening participation in UK HE has broadened the intake of non-traditional students, with a changing profile in both demographics and sociocultural factors (Small 2013; Webb *et al* 2013). These factors have been identified by many researchers as making some students more vulnerable (McIntosh 2017 and Webb *et al* 2017) and can impact on attendance performance and completion of their course. However, it must be stressed that 'at risk' and 'vulnerable' students are not just those from non-traditional backgrounds. Personal problems and mental health discussed later in section 2.4 of this chapter can have a major contribution to a student's vulnerability. Other vulnerable students are those identified with disabilities (both visible and invisible), Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME), international students and mature students may also experience being in the vulnerable category. There is now much more recognition and understanding of the issues that many students face when entering HE and Institutions are becoming much more proactive by putting in place support for students and frameworks to provide a better provision for student needs. It is now a condition for the new University Access and Participation plans, for the information on support and frameworks to be mandatory by the Office for Students (OfS).

It is important to identify the characteristics which identify vulnerable students. The Venn diagram in Figure 8 shows the relationship between the factors of the students' personal characteristics, home life and cultural and economic factors and how they can interact with each other or individually.

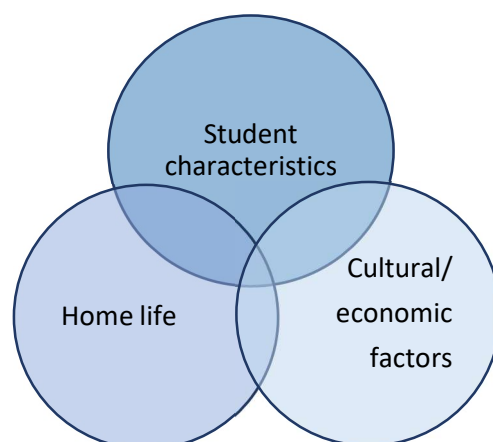


Figure 8. Venn diagram of the interrelationship of risk factors (adapted from Lochtie *et al* 2018, p77.)

These characteristics are further identified in Table 2 below. What is important to note is that these characteristics may not be just historic or current but can arise at any time during the students HE course. For example, a students who for financial reasons or new relationship finds themselves in a domestic abuse situation or a student who becomes pregnant or whose partner becomes pregnant during their course. It is also important to consider the impact that students at risk have on other individual students and the student community as a whole. Some students have strong friend and family ties and the impact of the loss of the close friendship networks when students leave their home domicile for university life cannot be underestimated. For students with long term friends that understand their issues or problems experienced, may then find it difficult to integrate into new groups to be accepted or uncomfortable having to explain personal circumstances again.

Table 2.Characteristics of at risk or vulnerable students (adapted with publishers' permission from Lochtie *et al* 2018)

Student Characteristics	Home Life	Cultural /Economic Factors
<p>A student who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a history or signs of alcohol and/or substance misuse. • Has a disability, learning or mental health difficulty. • Is a part –time student. • Is a mature student. • Has displayed offending behaviour and/or has had contact with the police of justice system. 	<p>A student who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a history of abusive relationships, safeguarding issues or domestic violence within the family. • Is a care leaver, estranged from their parents or the first generation in their family to attend university. • Has a history of homelessness or is living in unsafe housing. • Is pregnant, a student parent or responsible for dependents. • Is a commuter student or lives with a parent. 	<p>A student who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is from socio-economic groups D&E. • Is from an ethnic minority. • Is an asylum seeker. • Is an international student. • Has been previously identified as being at risk or vulnerable by a former educational institution or local authority.

A survey over three years by Hixenbaugh *et al* (2008) investigated the factors that enable students to succeed. Again, the research supported the later research of others (Small 2013; Webb *et al* 2013; McIntosh 2017; Webb *et al* 2017 and Lochtie *et al* 2018) and showed that the students physical and mental health, social and academic integration, and lifestyle variables such as the educational experience of parents, were all factors impacting on their success at university. Close connections were found with students who contemplated leaving their course and a feeling of lack of social integration at their university. The research found that "*the less realistic the expectations [of new students,] the more of a shock the reality and the more effort required to adjust and adapt*" (Hixenbaugh *et al.*, 2008, p. 7). This work and later research again supports the need to better arrangements to support students both before entry to university and in their transition period in the first few weeks of university life.

2.2.5 Embedding Personal Tutoring in the curriculum

It is evident from the early work by Earwaker in 1992 that the early models of student support: pastoral, professional and curricular, which have become the core of many HE models in support provision is still relevant, even with the changes in HE today. Developing a more holistic approach (Stork and Walker, 2015, p3) as discussed earlier, is essential to address the full needs of the student, both academic and personal. The main issue is how is the model of support provided (examples discussed in Section 2.1) and could they be better delivered as part of the holistic curriculum approach.

Research by Stevenson (2009) at the University of Westminster (UoW) was initiated by a review of the universities personal tutoring policy, which resulted from changing demographics of students entering HE, a need to provide a better HE experience and improve progression and retention. The pilot study by Stevenson was developed on undergraduate tourism courses and provided a basis to inform the UoW more widely as to best practice policy and procedures. The revised plan was to provide "a programme of regular personal tutoring sessions in the first semester of study" for all

new undergraduate students in order to provide students" with the opportunity to integrate academically and socially at an early stage of their studies" (UoW, 2005). The use of group tutorials was used to direct students towards self-evaluation and reflection and to develop their own skills audit and action plan. The curriculum model integrates the personal tutoring process with the learning skills and gives the process status with regular timetables group meetings and personal contact. Whilst tutors felt the pastoral and professional models had limitations in terms of delivery and effectiveness, the curriculum model was favoured and identified as being useful for personal developing planning (PDP) initiatives linking to personal tutoring at the university (Stevenson 2009). Stevenson identified through the use a focus group both advantages and potential problems of the revised system as shown in Table 3

Table 3. Advantages and potential problems of integrating personal tutoring into the curriculum (adapted from Stevenson 2009)

Advantages	Potential Problems
Identified the roles and responsibilities of students and personal tutors and was clearly integrated with teaching and learning	Identifying space in the curriculum for PDP and personal tutoring activities
Was supported by structured tutorials and was less open to varied interpretation by new tutors	Concerns that the inclusion of these activities in the main curriculum might prescribe and constrain communication between students and tutors
Enabled more positive tutoring relationships with students via regular and focused meetings.	Concerns that academic roles might be perceived as outweighing wider pastoral roles

For the pilot at UoW, the integration of personal tutoring was integrated into a core module 'Tourism Skills and Techniques' and teaching was linked to the PDP system, allowing for student reflection and development. It is interesting to note that in this pilot the tutoring was delivered within a specialist module, unlike the pilot at Hull University (Calcagno *et al* 2017) where the group

meetings were more generic. At the UoW, both staff and students were involved in the development of the new system which provided *'group tutorials to formalise, intensify and enhance interaction between students and their tutors in the first semester'* (Stevenson 2009). Regular meeting with tutors individually and through the tutor groups allowed both students and staff to be actively engaged with tasks and allowed other services (such as counselling and careers) to be brought in to support activities and raise awareness in the group sessions. There has been some previous research to Stevenson's (2009) work on the benefits of integration of academic learning, personal development and tutoring systems which supports the findings of the research. Solomonides and Swannell (1996), Nixon and Vickerman (2005), and Strivens (2006) all showed that by linking tutoring into the curriculum, brings the tutors into closer proximity to the students' experiences and development of new skills. Stevenson's research and that of the others recorded above, show that the embedding of personal tutoring in the curriculum allows staff to target students' needs both in relation to both educational and personal skills. It is therefore evident from the research that personal tutoring is best delivered as part of a clear integrated system within the university and not a 'bolt on' extra.

In summary, research shows there is a clear synergy between academic and personal or pastoral support and this is best delivered through a managed, holistic programme which is both deliverable and effective for both staff and students.

2.3 Recording data: the use of Dashboards and Learning Analytics.

Issues with poor student attendance, engagement and performance are becoming central to monitoring the delivery of teaching and support at universities in the UK and is particularly pertinent when considering 'at risk' students (McCluckie 2014, Webb *et al* 2017). Whilst a subject at the periphery of this particular research, it is now evident that it is essential to consider managing all student data as a means to record the student journey through HE, both in terms of their academic success but also personal development.

All universities collect data on many aspects of the student profile, including at a basic level, course and exam marks to more complex information including attendance and engagement with support (including personal tutoring sessions), use of the library and activity with the VLE. Through this data, analysis can be made which may then link a student's performance and wellbeing to other aspects of the students profile such as age, sex, parental background, receipt of the Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) and entry qualifications etc. The information is captured on a single data base known generically as a 'Dashboard' and whilst there are several commercial systems available to use, some universities also develop their own in-house system which better integrate with their current Student Information Systems. The advantage of having all the student information on one platform allows a system of alerts or flags to be used which can raise concerns with appropriate staff who can make an early intervention to alert and potentially support the student. The use of Dashboards can also support students who are performing well in their studies, encouraging them to progress further to an even higher level of achievement.

The NUS⁸ (2015) as part of their academic support benchmarking tool, suggest having some '*systems in place to alert staff to sudden drops in performance or attendance*' and that this should be a minimum requirement. Learning analytics are defined as "the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for purposes of understanding and optimising learning and the environments in which it occurs." (Siemens & Gasevic, 2012). This is a growing field in the UK and there are currently a number of applications of learning analytics which include Early Alert and Student Success, Course Recommendation, Adaptive Learning and Curriculum Design (Sclater, 2017). Figure 9 shows the data which can be captured through the use of dashboard and learning analytics and the measures to support students once any problems are identified.

⁸ <https://preview.tinyurl.com/y9ewbggk>

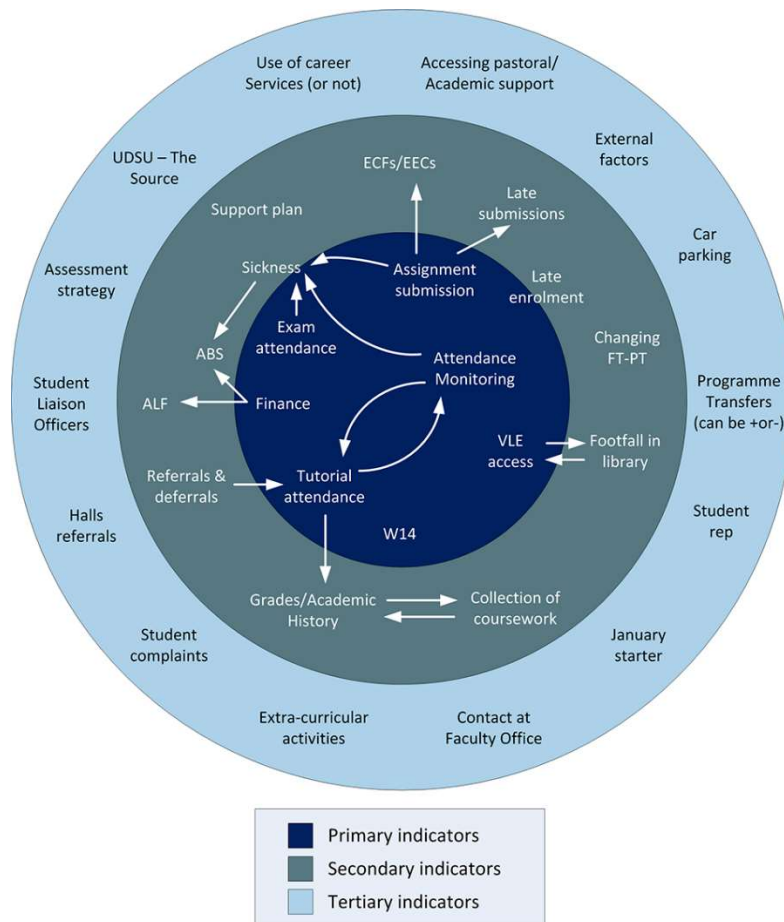


Figure 9. Engagement Analytics Diagram: Mutton (2012) reproduced from Lochtie *et al* 2018.

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Whilst initially focussed on the key aim of student retention and success, analytics are being used increasingly to monitor mental health amongst students and engagement with personal support services. It has been well documented (Anderson 2015) that changes in student wellbeing are often indicated by changes in behaviour such as attendance at classes, failure to submit assignments and reduced academic performance. Whilst having reliable data is useful, it is unusable without having effective interventions which could range from email alerts to the students and invitations for one to one targeted support (Sclater 2017). Whilst there are clearly important moral and legal obligations to act on available data, by acting does this remove the student autonomy in the HE learning processes? It also raises questions and concerns about student's privacy and consent to the data being used by the university, particularly with the implementation of the revised General Data

Protection Regulations (GDPR) in May 2018. Universities have received guidance from JISC (2017) that they are required to have full consent to collect data, particularly with regards to sensitive personal information which the HEIs need also need consent to act on. The NUS has raised concerns about the collection and use of sensitive data both at a university level and at the individual student level and as a result has worked with JISC to develop a Code of Practice for Learning Analytics (JISC 2015). Concerns have also been raised not only about the interpretation and use of the data but also the additional pressure this puts on staff to collect, manage and act on cases of student concern (Hughes *et al* 2018). Ahern (2018) suggests that *‘as a bare minimum any learning analytics implementation should be designed to be in alignment with both staff and student wellbeing policies’* and that in *‘producing a system that is not meaningfully used and may cause harm to our institutional communities’*

By also monitoring attendance through learning analytics, this can be a useful tool for capturing early students who may be at risk of withdrawal from their course (McCluckie 2014; Webb *et al* 2017) and can indicate problems with teaching, timetabling, workload that can be addressed at an early stage.

An example of a university using Dashboard Systems is Nottingham Trent University⁹ (NTU) who use a Dashboard system (NTU Student Dashboard) through which staff record centrally many features including course status, attendance, engagement, module marks, library use, notes and alerts. The system also keeps records of communication with individual students as well as scheduled meetings. Referrals are made online through the Dashboard system, with the consent of the student, to Student Support Services who then contact the student directly.

The guide for NTU staff clearly requires staff not to put any information of a personal nature on the Dashboard records and are advised to use neutral phrases like “ongoing issues” or “personal issues”. It is also advised that any notes used are shared with the agreement of the student. Students have

⁹ https://www4.ntu.ac.uk/adg/document_uploads/running_a_course/164304.pdf

full access to their own profiles and can add their own additional information or comments to their profile page. The use of Dashboard by NTU and similar systems used and developed by other universities seem to provide a holistic monitoring system which the staff and students can easily use. The advantage of using a Dashboard system is that students are less likely to fall through the net and as a result have a poor educational experience, underachieve and possibly leave their course (McCluckie 2014, Webb *et al* 2017).

2.4 National Monitoring of the Student University Experience

Whilst it is important to review internal monitoring of student engagement and success, it is also important to evaluate external assessment of the students experience at university. There are three main agencies externally to HEIs: the Teaching Excellence Framework, The Office for Students and the National Students Survey.

2.4.1 Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)

‘The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework’ (TEF)¹⁰ is a national exercise, introduced by the government in England. It assesses excellence in teaching at universities and colleges, and how well they ensure excellent outcomes for their students in terms of graduate-level employment or further study’ (Office for Students 2019). The framework was introduced by the government in 2017 to provide a resource for students to judge teaching quality in universities and to increase the importance of teaching excellence (and bring it into line with research excellence) when rating institutions.

HEI submissions for the TEF, included detailed metrics on all aspects of teaching and the student experience. The TEF also uses data from other sector bodies including NSS data.

¹⁰ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/what-is-the-tef/>

University submissions are rated and awarded gold, silver, bronze or provisional. A provider is awarded gold for delivering consistently outstanding teaching, learning and outcomes for its students.

The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) '**Going for Gold**' report by Beech in 2017 identifies a number of good pastoral support practices which were commended by the panel of judges for the award

1. Mentoring schemes – Newcastle University (peer mentoring) was commended on its mentoring schemes with its *'exceptional levels of staff and peer support offered to all groups of students'* were commended by the TEF panel for *'helping them to achieve outstanding outcomes'*
2. The University of Birmingham received praise for its academic and pastoral support with dedicated support schemes for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) and Black and Ethnic minorities.

The report also states that Institutions receiving a gold award seem to think more broadly when discussing key themes and appear to mention additional provisions such as digital developments and mentoring schemes. These institutions also tend to put students at the heart of their services, either by including student input or enhancing accessibility initiatives. Whilst pastoral care is not an actual measured metric for the TEF, it is evident from the submitted TEF reports, that the students experience does include some evidence of addressing personal care and mentoring. This was highlighted with the dedicated support schemes for minority groups such as LGBT and BAME at the University of Birmingham. It would be beneficial for all TEF reports submitted to include some evidence of the pastoral support policy and practice as well as user analytics for the service.

Of the TEF assessed institutions, only 23 per cent have received the highest award of Gold and included in this are both Keele University and Harper Adams University, which reflects the high quality of teaching and the student experience at both institutions.

2.4.2 The Office for Students (OfS)

The Office for Students which was set up in January 2018, is a non-departmental public body of the Department for Education, acting as the regulator and competition authority for the higher education sector in England. The structure is shown in Figure 10. The department states that:

‘We aim to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers. Our work covers all students whether undergraduate or postgraduate, national or international, young or mature, full-time or part-time, studying on a campus or by distance learning’.

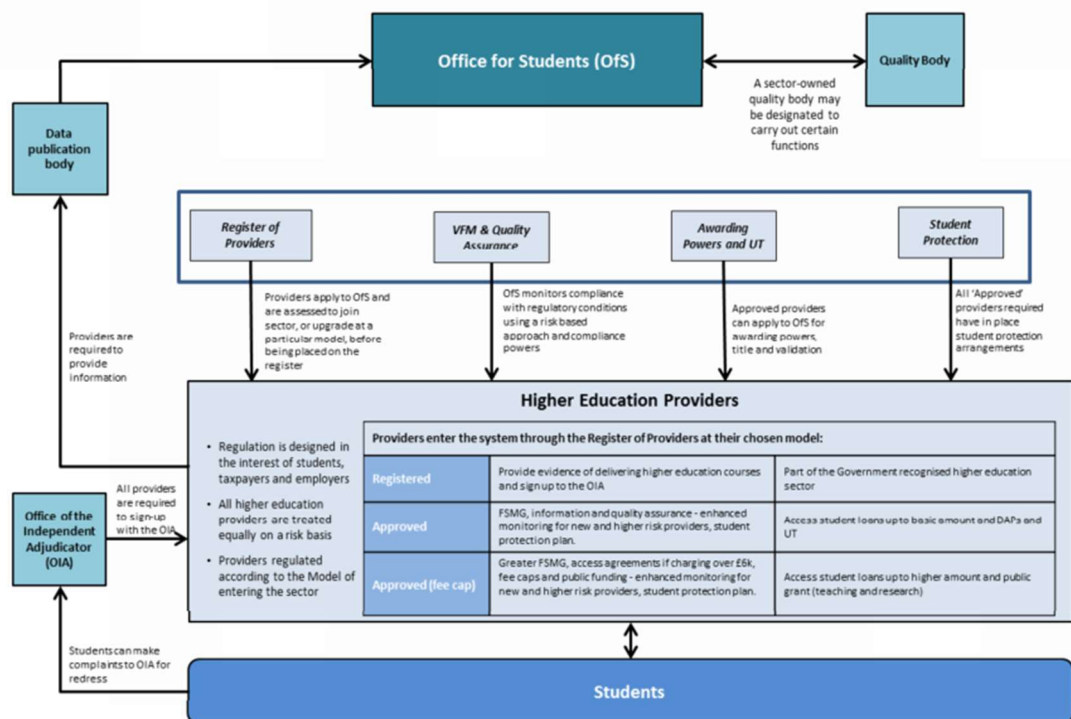


Figure 10. Office for Students framework (BIS 2016)

The OfS regulation framework report (2018)¹¹ criterion D1.1 outlines universities' responsibility to enable student development and achievement. This requires that all *'Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential'*. It is evident from this new framework that personal support is now being recognised and addressed, but it is unclear how the effectiveness of this support will be evaluated by OfS. The evidence required from HEIs is a critical self-assessment through internal or external monitoring and whilst all universities have in place robust systems for evaluation of academic support, anecdotal evidence suggests there are few universities that fully monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of personal support. The only effective way is to both monitor and collate usage of the personal support services and also attain student feedback in order to ascertain its efficacy. The area of student satisfaction is very subjective in its nature and it is important to consider whether the student has got the help they needed or whether they were unrealistic in their expectations of developing skills to become more self-reliant. Some universities use now using dashboard based learning and engagement analytics which provides a single data base with which to monitor a student's engagement with learning and support and can collate attendance, course marks and engagement with support services, including specialist learning support or disability needs. Research by Witt *et al* (2016) at the University of Plymouth has shown that when data is analysed and contextualised in a structured and measured way, it can be an extremely valuable mechanism to evaluate the uptake and efficacy of support in many areas of the university provision.

Within the OfS guidance are sections¹² on Student safety and wellbeing with some excellent examples of how some HEIs have addressed sexual harassment, hate crime and online harassment. Keele University have shown they have been proactive and promoted active bystander action through training staff on taking a disclosure of sexual violence and engaging students through a

¹¹ https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1406/ofs2018_01.pdf

¹² <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/>

sexual violence awareness week. The advice is available to both staff and students through disclosure guidance and support material.

In addition, student wellbeing and protection includes an expectation that all universities provide enough support for students. The insight brief and mental health data produced by the OfS will be discussed further in section 2.5.1 with regards to addressing mental health problems and effective student support.

2.4.3 National Student Survey (NSS)

The NSS is managed by the OfS on behalf of the UK funding and regulatory bodies - the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland), The Scottish Funding Council and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. The purpose of the survey is to gather students' opinions on the quality of their courses which helps to:

- inform prospective students' choices
- provide data that supports institutions in improving the student experience
- support public accountability (OfS 2019)

The data from the 2019 NSS is given below in Figure 11 and shows that nationally, most areas questioned have remained static in terms of agreement with the provision or in some cases such as Learning Resources and Overall satisfaction, with a slight increase in the level of satisfaction.

2019 National Student Survey

Percentage of respondents who gave the two most positive answers ('definitely' or 'mostly' agree) on:



¹ The data for the 'student voice' scale does not include responses to Q26 on the students' union, which is reported separately in this chart.

Figure 11. The NSS: Percentage of respondents who gave the two most positive answers (OfS 2019)

Nationally, whilst overall satisfaction is rising as universities respond to the comments from their students, there is still the concern over lower satisfaction with assessments and feedback which need to be addressed.

It is interesting to note that none of the NSS questions refer to pastoral care and with retention and success being important drivers in many HEIs, it is clear that not only academic support needs to be considered but also personal support which directly impact on their learning journey in HE.

In the national results from 2019 NSS, 69 per cent agreed they feel part of a community of staff and students. For some students a lower score may reflect the wider demographics of the student

population with commuter students and mature students less likely to become involved with community focussed activities on campus

Further analysis of the NSS results for both Keele University and HAU are given in Chapter 5: The Research Results and Analysis

2.5 What are the issues faced by students in HE?

The following sections are intended to give an overview of some of the current issues for students which may require additional support from personal tutors and specialist support providers whilst at university. This is not intended to be a detailed review of the research into the topics, but an evaluation of some examples of the current research and developments in the area and how they help to inform practice and policy.

2.5.1 Mental Health and Wellbeing

The increased number of cases of mental health problems amongst university students has been well studied and reported in recent years (Thorley 2017) and this has reached media attention through a number of well publicised and tragic deaths in the university student population in the UK. The suicide case in 2018 of Natasha Abrahart¹³ aged 20, who was a second year Physics student classed as 'vulnerable'. She had declared to staff that she felt suicidal and had already attempted to take her own life. In the inquest it was cited that the student did not appear to engage with the well-being services despite academic staff raising issues of concern. It was also cited in the inquest that Ms Abrahart suffered severe anxiety in having to do presentations publicly and that the university was remiss in not providing reasonable adjustments and an alternative assessment. Her suicide occurred on the day of her oral assessment. It is unclear whether the student was supported personally through tutoring and guided to well-being support services or whether support services

¹³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-45276134>

contacted her. The university's response in 2018 was "*We are putting in place a structure of preventative services and policies to try and avoid our students reaching crisis point.*" In the 18 months between October 2016 and April 2018, 11 Bristol University students died by suspected suicide with an additional two students by October 2019. It is unclear whether the suicides could have been prevented at Bristol but from comments by students at the university on the party and drug scene, combined with the high work pressures and expectations on students, may be contributing factors. Bristol Students have also voiced concerns publicly that student wellbeing services are badly overstretched and under resourced.

Nationally, the Office of National Statistics figures¹⁴ show 95 recorded university student suicides for the 12 months from July 2017 in England and Wales which equates to one death at a university every four days. Although this figure is lower than suicides in the general population, research from Thorley (2017) for the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) indicates that mental illness, mental distress and low well-being amongst students in HE in the UK are increasing and are high relative to other sections of the population. The research also shows that in the last ten years until 2017 there has been a five-fold increase in the number of students who disclose a mental health condition to their institution. Mental health problems are an issue which only until recently has been regarded with more acceptance with a lack of disclosure previously due to fears of discrimination, prejudice and social stigma. Academic, financial and social pressure are all cited as reasons which can induce or enhance mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. The report by Thorley (2017) suggests that

'Universities make the issue of mental health a strategic priority and adapt a 'whole university' approach based on prevention and promotion, early

¹⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-44583922>

interventions and low level support, responding to risk and crisis management, and referral into specialist care'

An article in The Guardian online¹⁵ by Shackle in 2019, suggested that universities are experiencing a surge in student anxiety, mental breakdowns and depression. University drop-out rates have been shown to rise for the third successive year with HESA¹⁶ data showing 26,000 students in England who first began studying their degree in 2015 did not progress to Year 2 of their studies. In some HEIs the dropout rate on some courses is as high as 20%.

Students at many HEIs have protested on the lack of counselling and the provision of better mental health services at university to help cope with the demand of student feeling stressed by academic pressures and other issues such as financial stress and adjusting to the transition to university life away from home. The media's response to student protests has gained the label "Generation Snowflake" (Times 2018)¹⁷ to represent the perceived fragility of the current student generation. There are also claims by the media and also some universities that students lack resilience and are expected to be spoon-fed at university and that they lack independence with parental interference at all levels in their university experience. However, for many students, the high cost of HE and the endless fear of failure can put huge pressure on often already vulnerable and 'at-risk' students.

Students with a medical history of mental health problems may not have had support prior to university due to the lack of resourcing from local social workers, youth services and specialist NHS mental health support for teenagers. Data from 32 NHS Trusts in

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/sep/27/anxiety-mental-breakdowns-depression-uk-students>

¹⁶ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/>

¹⁷ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/generation-snowflake-meet-the-professors-who-blame-helicopter-parents-for-coddling-the-minds-of-todays-students-mjwdxftx9>

England showed that in November 2017, two-thirds of under-18s referred for specialist mental healthcare in England were not receiving treatment.

As a result of this lack of diagnosis and support, meeting the additional challenges at university can then lead to further anxiety and stress, which the students then feel should be dealt with as part of their university experience.

All educational establishments have a duty of care to their students. It raises the question whether universities can adequately meet the demand from larger numbers of students needing increasingly higher and more specialist mental health support with a short waiting time. Contrasted with this is whether it is the universities responsibility to address this crisis with high demand on finances and resource needs at all universities across the UK, when they are primarily focussed on Higher Education? With increased numbers of students entering HE from a wider range of backgrounds the demand for HE to provide additional support services is increasing. In his book *'Kids these Days, Human Capital and the Making of Millennials'*, Harris (2018) identifies the *'pressures of the labour market, rising student debt and a target-driven culture as contributing to steep increases in anxiety and depression among young people. Young people feel – reasonably accurately – less in control of their lives than ever before'*.

A JISC report by Hall (2018) highlighted the importance of the use of Dashboards as university- level analytical systems to monitor and evaluate students' needs for support and engagement at all levels in their education. This analysis of wellbeing in the student population can be linked to other metrics such as attendance, students' academic performance and retention rates. What this approach requires is a 'whole university' approach with integration and easy access for selected staff to student data across all aspects of the university.

The World Health Organisation¹⁸ estimates that 20% of young people are affected by mental health disorders (1 in 5) which can impact on other chronic conditions such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and diabetes. In a survey by the NUS 2015 showed that 78% of students had experienced mental health issues in the previous year with 33% claiming they had had suicidal thoughts. In the 2015/6 academic year, 15,395 UK-domiciled new students in Britain disclosed a mental health condition.

In response to addressing the increased demand for mental health services, many universities have instigated the use of Wellbeing Services which use the skills of trained counselling staff to effectively triage students to assess their need for further specialist support. Thorley (2017) states that 'wellbeing relates to the extent to which an individual is feeling good and functioning positively. It is generally measured across four key indicators – happiness, life satisfaction, feeling things done in life are worthwhile and low anxiety'. The use of trained wellbeing staff in the university system may have an important function in listening to students concerns and advising further support if necessary.

It is well documented (Thorley 2017) that poor mental health and a sense of wellbeing can impact on both a student's academic performance and progression to complete their course and that a national study by HEPI (2019) and the HEA there has been a measured decline in student's wellbeing in recent years. As a result, 94% of universities have reported increased demand for counselling services and that at some HEIs as many as one in four students were using or waiting to use counselling services.

Research by Neves and Hillman (2017) focused primarily on a Student Academic Experience Survey but also included measures of wellbeing in the student population. Key measures of life satisfaction, life worthwhile, happiness and low anxiety were assessed although these evaluations are very

¹⁸ <https://www.who.int/activities/improving-the-mental-and-brain-health-of-children-and-adolescents>

subjective and opinions will vary enormously with the experience of the individual. The results below in Figure 12 show a clear decline year-on- year for the four measures assessed.

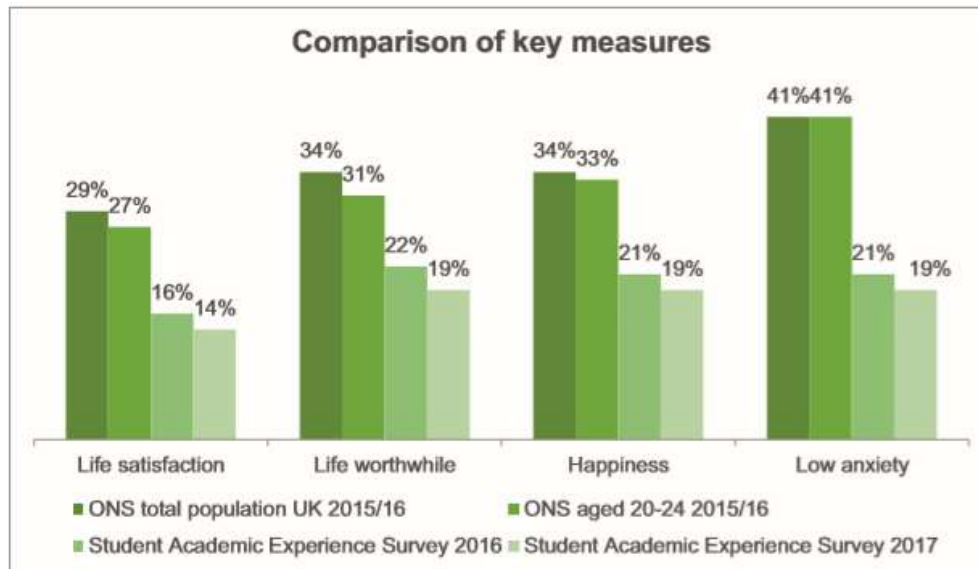


Figure 12. A comparison of key measures of wellbeing at UK universities (Neves and Hillman 2017).

The research also showed that males were more positive than females and there was less wellbeing satisfaction by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Asexual or Other students surveyed.

In addition, the investigation also evaluated well-being through learning gain. The data showed much more positive levels of linking wellbeing to student satisfaction with studying, indicating the importance of a fulling and productive learning experience.

Thorley's (2017) work (shown in Figure 13), illustrates the relationships of mental health problems and gains to learning is shown below with four possible scenarios:

1. **Student A** has an enduring mental illness, with appropriate diagnosis management and support resulting in positive learning gain.
2. **Student B** has undiagnosed and unsupported mental distress, resulting in no added value while at university.

3. **Student C** reports positive mental health but has experiences a badly designed curriculum and a low standard of teaching, resulting in no added value while at university.
4. **Student D** has positive mental health, well designed learning path resulting in significant learning gain while at university.

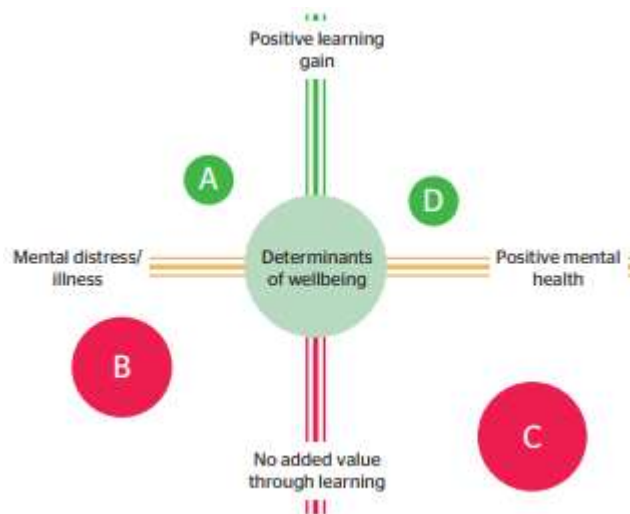


Figure 13. Determinates of Wellbeing (adapted from Thorley 2017 Fig 2.1)

It is only by fully understanding and tracking student wellbeing and engagement with support that positive learning gains can be made and proactive interventions put into place for the individual.

2.5.2 Duty of Care and Student Support

AMOSSHE, The Student Services Organisation, informs and supports the leaders of Student Services in the UK. In its governing principles and policies, it outlines HEIs Duty of Care with regards to students.

AMOSSHE states: *'In essence, a university has a general duty of care at common law: to deliver its educational and pastoral services to the standard of the ordinarily competent institution, and, in carrying out its services and functions, to act reasonably to protect the health, safety and welfare of its students. Generally, as a minimum a university should offer a basic welfare service to students to*

*provide confidential guidance and support on health and disability as it may affect their academic studies and progression. That basic service should include some form of effective triage system by which the university can identify those cases in which it is able to provide appropriate assistance itself, and those in which it needs to direct / refer students to external specialist and/or emergency support services. Institutions also have a duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to do everything reasonably practicable to ensure the health and safety of their students. **In order to assist it to discharge its duty of care, a university needs to ensure that it has in place effective and robust systems, policies and procedures for supporting and managing students, and that training and awareness-raising is provided for staff.***

This last sentence (in bold) is critical to achieving a robust, effective and holistic student support system in HE and will be discussed further in relation to staff training at both institutions in the research study.

It is clear that both Keele University¹⁹ and HAU²⁰ (Health and Wellbeing Policy for Students 2019) have in place robust and detailed policies and documentation that refer to health and wellbeing; what is provided and how it can be accessed and so are meeting their duty of care requirements. What is not clear is whether the levels of support provided meet the needs of the students or whether students are being unrealistic to expect an educational establishment to be able to cater totally for their health and wellbeing needs. It is also recognised by AMOSSHE that a university may owe an enhanced standard of care to particular groups of potentially vulnerable students which may include international students, students with mental health issues, disabled students and vulnerable minority groups. It is therefore pertinent that if a university is aware of students requiring enhanced standard of care on entry to HE, then this should be in place for individuals from the start of the course and closely monitored.

¹⁹ <https://www.keele.ac.uk/healthandwellbeing/>

²⁰ https://cdn.harper-adams.ac.uk/document/page/283_Health-and-Wellbeing-Policy.pdf

2.5.3 Transitioning to Higher Education

Students leaving home to study at university (which may be a long distance away), sometimes face difficult encounters and are at risk in many aspects of their lives during their first term of study. It is at this time that effective pastoral support is critical. Many students find the transition from FE to HE a challenge, with many components such as living away from home, separation from their support network of family and friends, accommodation and money concerns combined with high academic expectations and demands: all which can lead or enhance their anxiety and/or depression and reduce self-esteem (Hicks and Heastie, 2008; Palmer *et al* 2009).

It is widely recognised (Tinto, 1987; Yorke, 2001; Thomas 2012), that the first 12 months at university is the most vulnerable time for students with 10 per cent of students leaving their programme and as many as 42 per cent considering leaving their course entirely at some stage in their award programme.

The first term at university is therefore critical in ensuring that students are fully integrated socially and academically and that issues such as homesickness and difficulties making friends are identified quickly and supported before students enter a crisis situation and potentially leaves their course. This has a direct effect on university income, reputation and the impact on the success and retention initiatives may be reflected in the TEF assessments.

Research by Wilcox *et al* (2005) evaluating the role of social support in the first year experience of higher education highlighted the importance to students of access to social integration in the early stages of their university experience with new friendships providing emotional support and a platform for sharing stressful situations. The research also highlighted the importance of satisfactory living arrangements which can be critical when setting in at university in the first few weeks. It was found that course friendships and relationships with personal tutors were important but less significant and provided additional support when necessary. It is evident that having a period of time when students can socialise and become familiar before their course commences can reduce the

stress and feelings of isolation for many students entering HE. It is widely recognised that the first few weeks in the student's transition from FE to HE is critical in developing social integration and additional pastoral support may be necessary, in particular for those students identified pre-entry as being at risk. However, it is clear from the research by Tett *et al* (2016) that effective support both from peers and staff are essential throughout the student's time at university. Students that lack self-confidence and have concerns over the move to a more unfamiliar and challenging academic environment in HE, will inevitably find the transition very problematic and in some cases overwhelming to a point of personal crisis or deciding to leave their course. Scanlon *et al* (2007) suggest through their study, that peer support and peer networks helped many students to develop self-confidence and become independent learners. Peer support was also shown to help students engage better with staff for both academic and personal support. The research also showed that by the final years, students were able to engage meaningfully with the university systems they were in and to become active and autonomous learners. In addition it was also suggested from the study by Tett *et al* (2016) that the students in their final year had successfully aligned their past experiences of learning and found effective ways of fully engaging in the knowledge practices of the university through "developing an identity of participation" (Wenger 1998, 202) . Reciprocal relationships of students with staff have also been found to be important during the period of transition into HE, so that there is also a degree of trust in all aspects of the academic and personal support networks, which helps both students self-confidence and raises their self-esteem.

In order to help students make the transition from FE to HE, many universities effectively use a transition period as a time before academic studies start e.g. during induction, freshers or welcome week. During this time social events, sports activities etc. help students feel more settled as part of their new university community. Research by Sanne *et al* (2019) investigated student progress on a pre-academic programme in the Netherlands. The results showed that compared to a control group of students who did not access the programme, that student peer interactions were enhanced and that grades were enhanced in the trial group. However, the research showed that students that

were part of the pre-academic programme indicated that there was no effect on the sense of belonging for the trial students.

Having a well-planned induction period is essential not only for vulnerable students, but also those students who may have been away from education or have entered HE with non-traditional qualifications and have concerns about coping with the changes in academic level at university.

A longitudinal study by Tett *et al* in Scotland (2016) examined students moving both from FE to HE and then their journey through university and post- graduation. The research identifies four significant transitions, or set of critical moments, which can be identified when a student transitions to Higher Education:

- I. The loss of a sense of belonging on coming to university,
- II. Learning to fit in by the end of the first year,
- III. Changing approaches to learning and belonging in the final years of study,
- IV. Changing selves in the years following graduation.

The research showed that it was the positive relationships with fellow students and staff which made a significant difference to how these transitions were managed. It was also shown that the changes experienced continued to have an impact on the personal and professional lives of the study group many years after graduation. What was interesting about this research is that it tracked the student's transition over time and the study showed that transitions are not one-off events that occur when students first enter the university environment but are part of an on-going process that develops over time and is affected by students' capacity to engage with, and become part of, the wider university community.

First year transition to Higher Education has also been investigated by several researchers including Scanlon *et al.* (2007) and Brooman and Darwent (2013) with some additional focussed research on non-traditional students from Bathmaker and Thomas (2009) and Clayton *et al.* (2009). Hussey and Smith (2010) identified that non-traditional students may not have the socio-cultural capabilities

necessary to '*identify, understand and assimilate a complex range of assumptions, behaviours and practices*'. This identification of non-traditional students who may potentially struggle more than traditional students entering university will be explored further with research into the widening participation agenda in higher education. The work by Tett et al (2016) and others identifies clearly the importance of an ongoing process of both peer and staff support during a student's journey throughout the whole student's journey in HE.

In addition to identifying the problems of transition from FE to HE, research by Money *et al* (2017) investigated the expectations of students in year 2 and in their final year. Four areas were highlighted by the students as key to the transition into university these were directed time, non-directed time, support and relationships. Overall, the students were positive about their university experience and the levels of support offered to them, particularly noting that working in peer learning groups (PLGs) was beneficial. It was interesting to note that discussions with the students focussed on academic, financial and employability support and did not investigate the issue of personal support at the university in helping them with transitioning and coping at university. What was useful is that the research helped inform the university about improving information for students, support during induction and in future curriculum design.

2.5.3.1 The role of social media in supporting transition to university

Constant engagement with social media is now a huge part of young people's lives with continuous connection through mobile phones and computers to friends and family. Research by Thomas *et al* (2017a) explored the use of social media during the student transition from further education to university. Three stages in transition were recognised in the research: affirmation, assimilation and integration. The importance of both offline and online activities were evaluated for their impact on this critical period for the student starting at university.

Students at university use social media both for searching for new relationships when starting their studies and also to maintain existing relationships from peer groups back home. Both through the university as a whole and through specific course areas, friendship groups can be set up through social media (e.g. Facebook groups) to allow the students to form new supportive networks and communities. In a study by Schoenebeck *et al* (2016) evaluating the use of social media through the social media platform Facebook, conducted interviews with 28 college-going young adults in the USA. The investigation found that students undertook a practice called 'backstalking', where the students reviewed the timeline of activity and contacts history. By using this process, the students were able to investigate the profile and activity of new contacts they made at university. This research highlights the potential vulnerability of some students in managing their online presence and archiving historic data on their social media platforms.

Feinstein *et al* (2013) suggest that student use of social media is important in binding communities together but can induce various forms of social anxiety. This was found in the study of 268 students to be true for those individuals who lack confidence and who seek social approval to raise their self-esteem. These at risk students were found to be using social media to compare themselves to others and issues such as success, attractiveness, numbers of friends and numbers of 'Likes' in other individuals were all contributing factors to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. Feinstein *et al* also suggest that social networking can be regarded in some cases as 'pathogenic'. Lang and Barton (2016) identify the issues surrounding 'self-presentation' and how students identify themselves on social media. Their report showed that 84% of users experienced being tagged in undesirable Facebook photos and had subsequently taken defensive action.

On a more positive side, it has been shown by Malinen (2015), Ellison *et al.*, (2007) and Wellman *et al.*, (2001) that online social media networking can *support the development of social capital and community cohesion* and promote psychological well-being. Community relationship are

strengthened by the use of social media networks. Research on undergraduates by Ellison *et al* (2007) identified three social media strategies shown below.

- i. Initiating strategies, which allow for building connections with strangers that have never been met offline.
- ii. Maintaining strategies, used to maintain existing relationships with close friends/ties.
- iii. Social information seeking, to find out information with newly connected acquaintances.

With regards to the use of social media and transition to HE, there is mixed evidence from research with some academics (Sosik and Bazarova 2014) reporting positive outcomes from research on social media use, whilst others (Yang and Brown 2013) suggested those students who used Facebook to only pursue new relationships when starting university experienced more loneliness compared to students who maintained contact with existing social groups. Fraiberg and Cui (2016) also found the benefits of social media for overseas students who could use the platforms for access to new friends from their own country rather than just maintain connection with friends from home.

Facebook groups and other media such as Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp are now widely used by students on specific courses or in clubs on campus in order to communicate with peers with a common interest. The universities themselves also use Facebook and social media (e.g. Twitter) as a marketing tool to promote activities, student success and awards and to raise the profile of the HEI both nationally and internationally.

2.5.4 Imposter syndrome and developing student confidence and resilience

It is essential that students and staff recognise incidents of imposterism and the negative impact it can have on self-esteem, student identity and academic performance.

Imposter syndrome (also referred to as imposterism) is a term that was first used by psychologists Imes and Clance in the 1970s and related mainly applied to high –achieving women. However, it is

now more widely recognised that many people will experience some form of imposter syndrome in their lives.

Imposter syndrome refers to an internal experience of believing that you are not as competent as others perceive you to be. While this definition is usually narrowly applied to intelligence and achievement, it has links to perfectionism and the social context.

Whilst imposter syndrome is not a recognised mental health disorder it may be linked to social anxiety disorder and can trigger other recognised forms of mental illness such as depression. There may be many triggers to imposter syndrome including pressure to be a high achiever or parents being over critical in childhood development. In addition, recent research by Gardner *et al* (2019) has shown that students starting university may experience feelings that they do not belong or are not capable of achieving qualifications at HE level. As part of the research, accounting students on an intensive course where there was a high degree of competition were interviewed. As a result, students freely admitted they began to doubt themselves and their own abilities. Another study surveyed 2013 participants investigating sources of social support affecting imposterism. It was interesting to note that from this second study, students who sought social support from outside their peer group were negatively related to imposterism, whereas those students who sought social support from within their peer group positively related to imposterism. It is therefore critical to provide the appropriate support, in particular providing it from outside the student peer and social group.

Perfectionism is known to play a significant role in imposter syndrome and it is also important during support and counselling, that students self-evaluate and work on their own personal strengths and attributes rather than comparing themselves to others. Reflection can help the student accept the way they feel to move forward to achieve their personal and academic goals and accept there will always be some limitations facing them but remain positive in outlook.

One key issue relating to effective pastoral support is helping students develop both personally and academically to nurture a sense of wellbeing and connectedness (Thomas 2017). In developing the skills of confidence and resilience, this helps a student deal with failure or poor grades so they can progress through reflection to adapt better to future changes in their personal life and careers.

Research by Dutton *et al* (2004) suggests that training to help students gain confidence should be part of personal tutor training and work towards students becoming '*Citizen Scholars*'. The citizen scholarship framework suggested by Arvanitakis and Hornsby (2016) encompasses both confidence and resilience in students and is seen to be an important part of the social experience in higher education. However, in order to increase personal levels of confidence, resilience and independence, students have to fully engage with the support available, which needs to be fully skilled and effective.

Resilience is a term now widely used in education alongside student welfare and with the growing concerns and incidence of student mental health problems, it is an important subject in pastoral support and student wellbeing. Resilience is defined in broad terms as the ability to recover and withstand change. Duckworth (2016, p.1) also used the term 'grit' and defined it as "the combination of perseverance and passion for especially long-term and meaningful goals" and suggests it is a better predictor of academic performance and graduate marks. Developing perseverance and persistence are important graduate skills not only for university students but for personal development and career progression. Research by McIntosh and Shaw (2017) has analysed a range of attributes of student showing resilience and have developed a *Resilience Index* which has a strong positive relationship with life satisfaction. What appears to be important from the research on resilience is that students demonstrating poor resilience are not seen as weak or failures but are identified by trained staff and supported to develop the skills they need. In entering HE, students may initially appear to be confident and resilient individuals, but the impact of negative,

unconstructive academic feedback, unprofessional staff interactions, discrimination and peer conflict may result in students developing symptoms of stress and further mental health problems.

McIntosh and Shaw's research identified a resilient student as one who would demonstrate the following:

Internal factors

- Self-management, including goal setting and persistence.
- Emotional control: ability not to dwell on negative experiences or over-react to situations.

External factors

- Social integration within the university setting.
- Support networks: an ability to turn to formal or informal support networks.
- Social relationships: Happiness with existing relationships and depth of these relationships.

(Adapted from McIntosh and Shaw 2017)

Resilience may also have close links to Imposter syndrome (already discussed earlier), where students lack confidence and consider they are 'out of place' or 'unworthy' at university.

The extensive research report by McIntosh and Shaw (2017, p.37) also suggested in their recommendations to that *'the sector should seek to build a nationally recognised 'Resilience Toolkit' to support HE institutions in being proactive in creating the conditions for the development of student resilience'*. A project by Caruana (2017) on promoting students' 'resilient thinking' in diverse higher education learning environments, provides a good insight in the research that has been undertaken to suggest the causes of a lack of resilience and the support that can be provided effectively.

In response to the research in this area of resilience, AMOSSHE, the Student Services Organisation, developed a resilience toolkit²¹ for support staff and tutors to use in HE. The toolkit addresses three

²¹ <https://resiliencetoolkit.org.uk/using-the-toolkit/>

different approaches to developing student resilience: Social, Self-Management and Emotional Balance. The toolkit provides evidence and good practice from others research as well as examples of providing frameworks for student mental well-being in university. Leeds Metropolitan University (now known as Leeds Beckett University) produced a student focussed online support booklet *The Leeds Met Book of Resilience*²² which aims to support students with various problems around resilience through interviews and case studies with students. AMOSSHE also produce online support workshops on *Making mistakes and getting things wrong*, *Learning from failure* and *Self-talk and learned optimism*, all which help with building student confidence and resilience both personally and academically.

Recent research by Winstone *et al* 2020 suggest that extra-curricular activities directly correlate with wellbeing and sense of belonging for students at university and that these activities, which are made accessible to a wide range of students to promote equity, irrespective of a student's background. This research supported earlier work in 2011 by Stuart *et al* which indicated that there was a distinct difference in engagement between traditional and widening participation students with less engagement amongst older and ethnic minority students. The data also showed that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds engaged less in extra-curricular activities and more time working.

In addition, both examples of research in this area show that extra-curricular activities allow students to develop the skills needed beyond university and are therefore essential in personal development with key benefits being enhanced self-identity, improved social networks and enriched career prospect pathways and employment.

²² <https://resiliencetoolkit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/the-leeds-met-book-of-resilience.pdf>

2.6 Widening Participation

Widening participation has expanded the opportunities for students to enter university from a broader range of backgrounds. This has resulted in the need to incorporate additional measures to ensure wellbeing and retention, which has made widening participation a clear focus for effective pastoral care.

This has led to increasing demand on both financial resources and in support staffing to ensure that students from non-traditional backgrounds are actively supported and feel a sense of belonging amongst their peers.

Bell *et al* (2009, p.13) state that

‘Universities have moved from being autonomous, exclusive and largely elitist institutions to potential instruments for social mobility through mass participation’

Apart from the social issues of inclusivity and addressing the needs of a wider range of students, there has been much debate centred on whether concerns for equity and fair access are diluting the commitment to academic excellence. However, the concept that university education is just about academic excellence is now fairly outdated and the wider social purpose and student autonomy and emancipation in education has a much higher profile. The latter is particularly important with more students undertaking increased self-study time and becoming more independent learners throughout their degree journey.

2.6.1 A brief history of widening participation in Universities

In the post war years, HE was very much the realm of the educational elite from private schools and from middle class, affluent families. Entry into HE from disadvantaged backgrounds was mainly for those on assisted places at Grammar Schools through to university via entry scholarships or from sponsorship from individuals or charities.

Improved UK higher education opportunities were extended following the Robbins²³ report in 1963. In the 1960s less than 10% of the age cohort of 18 year olds had the opportunity to enter higher education. The creation of new universities aimed at focussing on technology and vocational studies were developed from 1970 and formed the new Polytechnic HE system of 30 institutions formed from local technical colleges, whilst other new universities were developed from an elite mix of advanced technology colleges (e.g. Bath, Aston, Bradford, Brunel and Salford). Whilst the two tier system in HE now offered a wider range of course and entry access to allow wider opportunities to students, there was a still the perception that Polytechnic degrees were of lower value than the Russell Group provision.

In addition, the creation of the Open University (OU) in 1969 provided access to HE for a new group of students who did not have conventional entry qualifications and academic backgrounds but were often mature student and those in full time employment. The OU provided distance learning courses where students could study a wide variety of module to create a portfolio of academic credits towards Higher Education Diplomas and Degrees over a period of time.

Through the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, the binary policy was abolished and new post 1992 universities were created. From the 1992 Act, the funding of HE was also reviewed with universities having to be more transparent in the balances between teaching and research activities. The drive to improve widening participation has been driven by government initiatives at the start of the 21st century and by 2003, the UK Government policy was to ensure that 50% (in 2003 it was 30%) of the relevant cohort (18 – 30 year olds) participated in some form of higher education by 2010.

The Dearing report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE 1997) showed that the growth in higher education had provided opportunities to a wider range of students and that the New Labour policies has achieved the proposed 'Learning Society'. The government

²³ <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/robbins1963.html>

policies which followed the Dearing report emphasised the increasing participation amongst specific disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds (Parry 2010). The Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) supported widening participation by offering additional funding for students from disadvantages areas (known as postcode premium) with low access to HE and also for disabled students. The Dearing report also suggested the introduction of a sub-Bachelor degree or as it is now known, the Foundation Degree. This award is concurrent with the Higher National Diploma (HND) provided by some vocational universities and is aimed at students with non-standard entry qualifications and who perhaps see the award as a stand-alone award in HE or a means to progress to a full degree, which they otherwise would not have been able to access. Further Education (FE) colleges with HE awarding powers now have a large number of the Foundation degree award courses in the UK.

In 2005 two projects, the 'Aim Higher initiative' aimed to widen access to and participation in HE through raising aspirations and attainment and the 'Lifelong Learning Network', which aimed to provide better access to vocational education. Despite these projects, the introduction of tuition fees in 1998 reduced applications from students from the very groups targeted for widening access.

For a broader HE provision to widen participation and provide fairer access, there has to be an expansion in resources. In Trow's paper (1989) '*The Robbins Trap: British attitudes and the limits of expansion*', he suggests that if you let more students into HE, then the ambition for the kind of experience they will have will be reduced. However, it is evident that it is a far more complex picture than just numbers of students entering various types of institutions in HE and that completion and withdrawal are also important factors to consider.

Evidence indicates that whilst gender, ethnicity and disability are contributing factors restricting some students from entering HE, the key determinant is their socio-economic circumstances.

Layer (2005) suggests that full inclusion for students in HE is challenging and identifies several 'traps' (pp45 - 48) which need to be avoided in order to be more inclusive. These include *cherry-*

picking, fuzzy thinking (which refutes the concept that ‘aiming higher’ and ‘widening participation’ are the same thing), the *squeaky wheel* (funding institutions on the reward principle), *blaming other people* and *short-termism*.

A common observation of widening participation in HE is the use of the term ‘barriers’ (Thomas, 2005; Gorard *et al.*, 2007.) to help explain and evaluate some of the difficulties and challenges that students from traditionally under-represented groups might face when considering university entry. Barriers identified are the financial costs of going to university, time to study (particularly managing study with childcare), travel, motivation and Institutional barriers. The latter is particularly important with how universities deal with advertising their courses, transport and access to sites and flexibility for some applicants. There have been concerns expressed that groups of school pupils singled out for support to address the widening participation policies required by universities, are being stigmatised. Jones and Thomas (2007) propose that targeted applicants for widening participation are identified as lacking culturally and educationally and the communities they come from are negatively labelled as ‘disadvantaged’ or socially excluded. However, research by Baxter *et al* (2007) suggests that students on AimHigher programmes who are targeted due to their socio-economic status with engaging events and initiatives regarded the experience as very positive and confidence building. It is unclear that whilst AimHigher activities may encourage pupils to consider coming to university and raises aspirations, it does not seem to raise attainment levels in the long term and may be a function of the particular school system, parental influence and peer pressure amongst the pupils.

Parental education has a big influence on a potential student’s decision to enter university. It has been suggested by Day *et al* (2020) in a report *Making Universities Matter: How higher education can help heal a divided Britain*²⁴, that students who are from families whose parents have not had tertiary education (known as First in Family) and have concerns about the high student debt could be

²⁴ <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Making-Universities-Matter-Report-125-FINAL.pdf>

encouraged to continue into HE by a waiver on the tuition fees for the first year. The government has also supported initiatives such as the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) to encourage and attract pupils in schools from disadvantaged backgrounds (referred to as POLAR and which are calculated via postcodes). Whilst it is argued by Day *et al* (2020) that universities have the potential to bridge economic and social divisions, and to address regional disparities and deep-seated inequalities, it also remains an issue for HEIs with less funding, higher costs, limited resources and an acknowledgement of the problems faced for students from wider backgrounds.

In order to support access, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) state that university providers can make unconditional offers for university places to applicants on specific sets of characteristics, linked to widening participation policies.

- I. Unconditional offers made to all applicants from a particular background, or with a specific characteristic (e.g. care leavers).
- II. An unconditional offer made to an individual applicant based on, or to support, their individual circumstances, for example, a mental health condition or mitigating circumstances.
- III. Participation in a summer school or other outreach project.

Extending the chance for people from diverse backgrounds to participate in HE is now a priority in the UK. However, it is well documented that the transition to HE is challenging for disabled, mature, black and minority ethnic students as well as those that have attained vocational FE qualification such as Level 3 Diploma which are perceived by some HEIs of less value for HE entry compared to A levels.

2.7 Financial Concerns of going to University

With a change in funding for students entering university and the increase in student fees, concerns about how students can manage with increasing accommodation and living costs (particularly in high costs areas such as London) are causing many additional personal problems for some individuals. Some students may need to gain part-time work in order to provide additional income and this can

impact on both their studies and wellbeing. Concerns over increasing graduate debt is also a worry to many students.

Research by the Institute of Fiscal Studies²⁵ (2018) showed that whilst it is financially worthwhile for a student to gain an undergraduate degree, there is significant variation across subjects. It is evident that subjects such as medicine, law and economics result in highly paid careers and job security, but a significant minority of mostly men, are unlikely to see positive results from gaining a degree. The type of institution was also found to be important with male students showing the benefits of attending a Russell Group university also enhances earning and career potential contrasting with females seeing a similar net lifetime return irrespective of their chosen university.

Figure 14 below shows male earnings by subject and Figure 15 female earnings by subject.

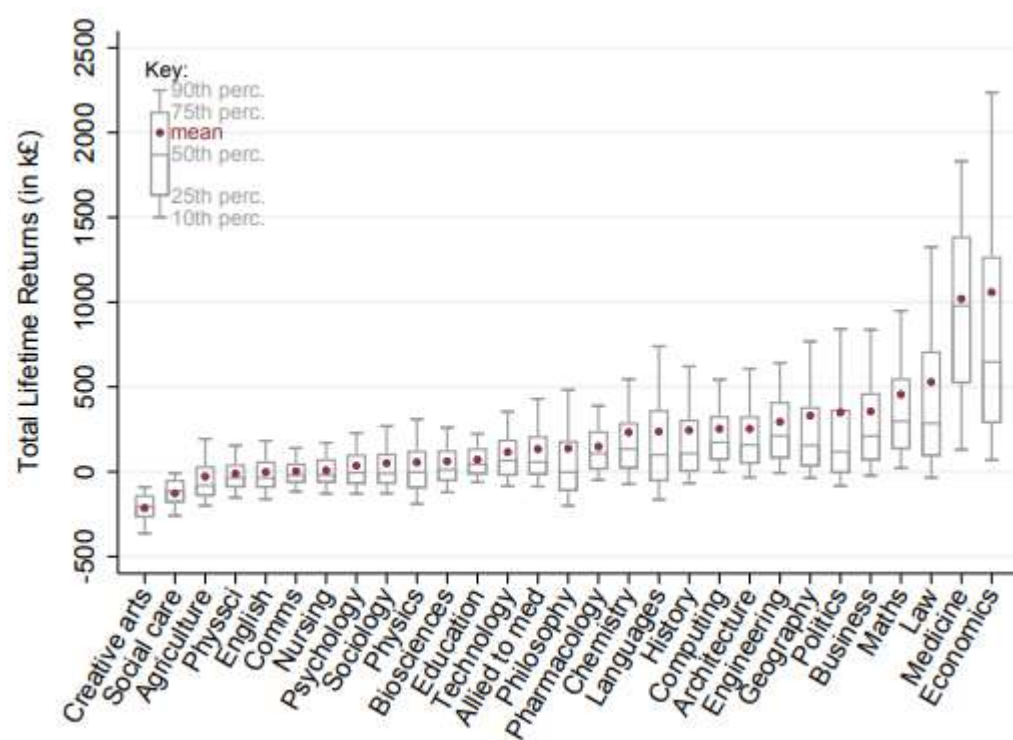


Figure 14. Lifetime earnings for Men on graduate courses in HE (Fiscal Studies Report 2018)

²⁵ <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/R167-The-impact-of-undergraduate-degrees-on-lifetime-earnings.pdf>

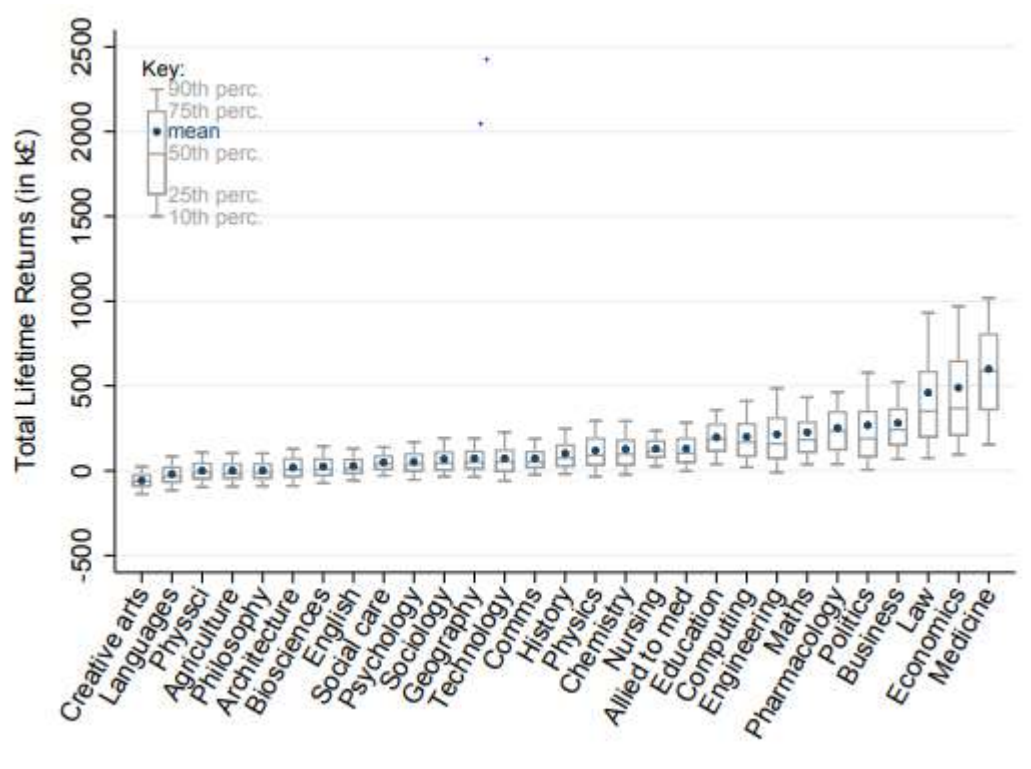


Figure 15. Lifetime earnings for Women on graduate courses in HE (Fiscal Studies Report 2018)

It is interesting that the report shows that more women go to university than men and a higher proportion of women, 85%, compared with 75% of men, will get a positive financial return. However female graduates have lower lifetime earnings which is likely to reflect women taking time off work or reduced working hours to have children.

The Office of Students (OfS) is undertaking a review of university funding in early 2020 which aims to evaluate 'value for money' for the £1.3bn spent on university funding across more than 300 HE providers. The OfS review wants to focus on aims to invest in 'skills, industries and Infrastructure' and also to respond to the Augar²⁶ review recommendations to reduce student tuition fees from £9250 to £7500 per year from 2021. However, it is important to recognise that the benefits of a degree extend far beyond the issues of salary and that the experience, friendships and contacts students make at university are also an investment for their future. Students themselves are looking

²⁶https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/805127/Review_of_post_18_education_and_funding.pdf

at value for money and a survey of 14,000 students by HEPI²⁷ in 2016 found that fewer than two in five students thought they were getting value for money with tuition fees, quality of teaching and contact hours were found to be the biggest cause of dissatisfaction.

Figure 16 below shows analysis of student's perception of value for money from the 2016 Student Academic Experience Survey (Neves and Hillman 2016) from 2007 to 2016. The survey shows statistically significant results with a rise in responses stating poor value for money and a similar decline in responses mirrored good value for money.

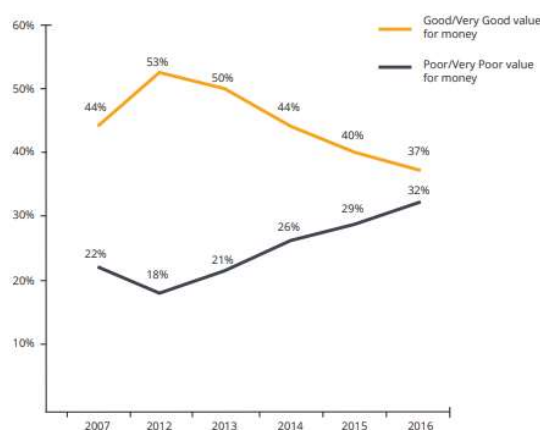


Figure 16. Student perception of university value for money 2007 – 2016 (Neves and Hillman 2016)

²⁷ <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2016.pdf>

What is also evident from the report is that students seem unclear as to how their fees are spent.

Figure 17 shows the responses of 15, 221 students, with the majority (75%) not aware of where the money is spent.

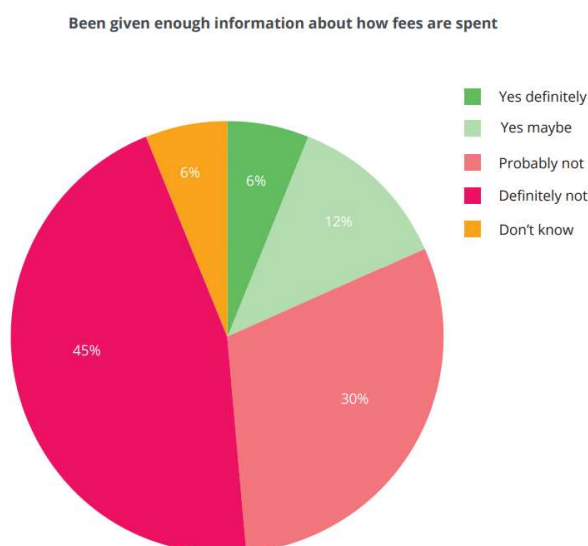


Figure 17. How fees are spent (Neves and Hillman 2016)

What is unclear is how students perceive the divide between tuition fees and the university costs for facilities both academic and social. For example, specialist science courses where there is a high resource cost for laboratories cause high overhead costs for the HEI and many institutions have limited funds for expansion of facilities.

With average graduate debt in the region of £50,000 per student, it is evident that students are looking more closely at courses which will not only be of interest or essential for their career pathway, but also financially viable in terms of employment and progression. There has also been a response from Jo Grady from the Universities and Colleges union (2020)²⁸ commenting on the fact that it is too simplistic to link the quality of a course with future salaries and that "*earnings potential is also heavily impacted by factors such as an individual's background, their parents' jobs, their gender, where they are from and where they live after graduating.*"

²⁸ <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/10671/More-to-graduate-earnings-than-just-a-degree-says-UCU>

Table 4 below shows how the proportions of students at different universities²⁹ has changed over time. Whilst numbers have increased across all HEIs, the growth in numbers is most pronounced amongst the newer more selective universities and less expansion in the Russell Group Institutions.

Table 4. HESA data by Institution Type (Institute of Fiscal Studies report 2018)

Institution	1975/76	1980/81	1985/86	1990/91
Russell Group ³⁰	46,256	65,626	71,639	76,641
Pre-1992 Universities	29,965	45,094	52,751	61,009
Other (more selective)	46,231	73, 240	86,167	108,027
Other (least selective)	30,591	44, 265	44,694	55,794
Total	153,043	228,225	255,251	301,471

The increased expansion of student intake numbers in the smaller more selective universities may reflect attracting local students in an urban area allowing students to commute from home more easily. It may also suggest students being more able to access university on lower entry grades than Russell group universities or specialist HEIs with industrial links and high employability.

Many universities have sought to address the widening participation divide by offering scholarships and bursaries to students from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as increasing admissions by providing unconditional offers.

The large increase in student fees now in HE is thought to be the major deterrent, mainly from part – time students, to further widening participation. Peter Horricks, former VC of the Open University (OU 2014-2018), pointed out that the overall number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds had in fact actually fallen by 17% since 2012 if the drop in part-time students was considered.

²⁹ <http://dro.dur.ac.uk/14978/1/14978.pdf>

³⁰ <https://russellgroup.ac.uk/>

“Part-time and mature students are more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds and often studying part-time is their only option, so the sharp drop in part-time students in England is actually undermining the UK government’s efforts to open up higher education.” (OU news 2018³¹)

The recently published Augar Review of Post -18 Education and Funding (May 2019) made the suggestion that reduced fees for students combined with a return of maintenance grants for disadvantaged students would attract and support students, who would otherwise not consider university due to the concerns of paying back the student loan arrangement. The report also suggests that there is a strong case for additional funding to universities that support disadvantaged students given the recognised additional costs of educational provision and pastoral care. This review recognises the increased burdens faced by universities in supporting a wider and larger cohort of students.

The Augar report also notes that the use of Foundation years or pre entry access as a preparation year for HE has been used as a tool for evidence of widening participation. The review notes that the use of pre entry years to create 4 year degree pathways has tripled in five years from 10,000 to 30,000 students in 2017/18. It is questionable whether all students who are on these courses require additional support compared to other weaker students directly entering HE on sometimes low grades entry, but the expansion of entry to universities through part-time provision will inevitably put a further strain on support services.

The concerns about value for money and graduate employability have seen the recent growth of Modern Apprenticeships. Apprenticeships involve working in a paid profession for 80% of the working week and 20% in study either at an FE college university, depending on the level of entry and level study. Whilst in the past apprenticeships were seen mainly for the practical skills; for example in the construction industry and engineering, the new degree apprenticeships (levels 5 – 7)

³¹ <https://ounews.co/around-ou/ou-speaks-out/ou-calls-for-action-after-figures-show-disadvantaged-students-let-down/>

cover subjects such as business and administration, protective services (e.g. Police) and artificial intelligence data analysis. Some 'earn while you learn' apprenticeships can be achieved in shorter time periods than many degrees as they are more focussed on the employer's requirements with fewer holidays and in- work training and experience delivered alongside the academic provision. However, the block teaching required by apprenticeships awards can often be a challenge for universities trying to integrate the different delivery models alongside traditional term or semester teaching.

Another issue around financial concerns is that of students having to combine part-time work with their university course during term time. The advent of zero hours contracts and low wages for part-time work combined with inflexible academic timetables, means that many students find it hard to gain part time work to support their finances during the year. Some smaller universities may also find it difficult to offer part –time courses or twilight teaching due to staffing and timetabling restrictions.

2.8 Accommodation

Student accommodation can vary widely from university owned on-site and offsite provision to large providers of student accommodation such as Unite Students³² to private landlords. Satisfactory student housing in the first term of study can be critical for new students in the transition stage adapting to life and university and being away from home.

The newer accommodation specifically built for students living now often has ensuite facilities and communal cooking areas which helps students to integrate, make friends and feel less isolated. However, many students where housing is limited due to finance or access may find the experience both stressful and lonely which can initiate mental health problems and the potential for a student to leave their course. Most universities now have provision through their Student Union and Student

³² <https://www.unitestudents.com/>

Services (and also support from agencies such as Citizens Advice) to help with disputes with private landlords which again can be time-consuming, expensive and stressful for the students concerned.

Universities who provide their own on-site accommodation may also support students with additional staff on site (as with Keele University or student wardens (as with HAU) to help students with personal problems, disputes with other students or identify students that may be at risk.

When considering a student's experience of university, it is important to remember that not all students can or want to live in campus accommodation. They may reside in local rented accommodation, with parents or their own family. These students, usually referred to as 'commuter students' travel into university and as a result, often have fewer opportunities to become part of the campus community. A Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI)³³ study in 2019 looked at commuter students (students living at home and not on campus) and explored their experience of university life.

Some conclusions in the report found that:

- Commuter students are more likely to be first-in-family students, to come from a lower-income household, to be mature students and to have an ethnic minority background.
- At 10 universities, over half the students live in the parental or guardian home, including City University London, the University of Wolverhampton and the University of Bradford.
- Institutions with a lower proportion of commuter students are more likely to achieve higher student satisfaction scores.

The recommendations from the report was to provide a greater sense of community for the commuter students allowing them to better access lectures and facilities. The importance of an online support network to help commuter students feel engaged was also suggested in the report.

³³ <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/12/13/6933/>

In an earlier report by Thomas and Jones (2017) *Student engagement in the context of commuter students*, identified the multiple identities of a commuter student and the large variation in age, socio-economic status and ethnicity etc. which all impact in their engagement with the HE experience. For many students it is the practical problem of long journeys to university, using sometimes unreliable and expensive public transport for a timetable that often does not suit their needs. The study also concluded that commuter students have lower rates of engagement with activities across the board which included social events and enhancement activities which may be social and academically related. What the report did not investigate was the students' engagement with support and it may be wrongly assumed that students living at home do not require pastoral care and if necessary will seek outside agencies for counselling such as mental health. It may therefore be more challenging for students who are not resident on campus to easily access either personal tutor support or specialist services support and advice (both pastoral and academic support) at a time suitable to them.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This Chapter has provided an insight into the wide range of issues that encompass personal support. It is evident that research is growing in this area, particularly with regards to mental health, transitioning to higher education and widening participation. The various models for delivery and the complex role of the personal tutor have been appraised and discussed with regards to research and studies in this area.

Chapter 3: The Universities and their Support Systems

3.1 The Universities used for this research study

The two universities selected for this research study have a different mix of students and range of courses. Harper Adams University is the employer of the researcher for this study (Senior Lecturer in Ecology and Environmental Science and Course Tutor for the last 26 years) and Keele University, which is the awarding body of the researcher's EdD.

The criteria for selecting the universities included: ease of access due to geographical location, time available for data collection and availability of students and staff for interviews. The HEIs have a very different mix of students, subject combination and student bodies which make them suitable sites for this research. However, as the researcher has links to both HEIs, there needs to be an awareness of this and acknowledge potential bias in the research process and mitigate wherever possible any issues arising from this. Whilst a wider range of universities would have yielded more data, practicality, time and available resources were important considerations to make the research viable.

The universities are reviewed in alphabetical order.

3.1.1 Harper Adams University³⁴, Newport, Shropshire.

Founded in 1901 from a charity set up from the estate of Thomas Harper Adams, the College was initially for Agricultural Education for six students. It has since grown to be an institution offering a wide range of BSc and FdSc degree land based courses including Agricultural Engineering, Animal Health Veterinary Nursing, Land Management, Countryside Courses, Food and Business for the Agri-

³⁴ <https://web.archive.org/web/20160426194652/http://www.harper-adams.ac.uk/about/history.cfm>

Food sector in addition to the core business of Agriculture. In 1996 the university received its own degree awarding powers and in 2012 the title 'University' was conferred on the institution.

The estate is over 607 hectares and there has been extensive additions to the campus in the last 5 years with new residential accommodation, additional teaching facilities, a new Student Hub and enlarged laboratory space. The estate includes a large working mixed farm which is used for teaching, research and as a commercial enterprise. As a small specialist university, research is primarily focussed on applied work in the land and food sectors. In 2014, the Research Excellence Framework deemed the research at Harper Adams University to be of international quality, and more than half world leading or internationally excellent.

There are approximately 5400 students on full time courses at Harper Adams University. All students undertake a placement year as part of their courses which is managed and fully supported by the university. The university also has a joint UK-China undergraduate degree programmes where students from Beijing Agricultural College and Huazhong Agricultural University study their final year at Harper Adams.

Most first year students are resident on campus and due to public transport difficulties, the rural site is not easily accessible to commuter students from a wider area unless they have their own transport.

3.1.2 Keele University³⁵, Keele, Staffordshire

Keele University is situated on a 250 hectares estate as was founded as the University College of North Staffordshire in 1949 and received its Charter as the University of Keele in 1962.

With over 10,000 students registered at the university on both full and part time courses, the university offers a wide range of courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level, including

³⁵ <https://www.keele.ac.uk/discover/ourhistory/>

integrated Masters Degrees. In 2002, the medical school began teaching clinical undergraduate medicine and in 2020, the university will partner Harper Adams University to offer joint Veterinary degrees for the first time. In the 2014 Research Excellence Framework, Keele University was ranked 15th out of 67 nationally for the impact of its research.

Keele University has good transport links and many students commute from home from the neighbouring urban areas

3.2 Awards and Recognition

In addition to both universities having received TEF Gold award Status they have in recent years, received significant awards in recognition of their highly rated student experience and support provision. In the 2017 *Times Higher Education* Student Experience Survey³⁶, Harper Adams University topped the list in providing the best welfare support for its students.

Keele University was placed 1st in England in the National Student Survey for four out of the last five years and was awarded University of the Year for Student Experience by the Times Good University Guide in 2017. Harper Adams University was awarded The Sunday Times Good University Guide Modern University of the Year 2020 and runner up University of the Year also in 2020. In 2019 Harper won the 'WhatUni' Students Awards for both Student Support and Job Prospects.

³⁶ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/best-universities/student-experience-survey-2017-best-uk-universities-student-welfare>

3.3 Institutional Characteristics

It is important as part of the research to investigate personal tutoring and pastoral care in the two HEIs, to evaluate the different institutional characteristics. Data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)³⁷ for the period 2016-17 (the time period for the research data collection) is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. HESA data on Keele University and Harper Adams University 2016-17

HESA category	Keele	HAU
Student data		
Females all years	6175 (58%)	2700 (50%)
Males all years	4425 (42%)	2710 (50%)
Student total	10600	5410
Ethnicity (White)	6605 (62%)	4980 (92%)
Ethnicity (Black, Asian, Mixed)	2360 (22%)	75 (1%)
Ethnicity (Other)	400 (4%)	135 (2%)
UK students	9360 (88%)	5190 (96%)
EU students	205 (2%)	70 (1%)
Non EU students	1030 (10%)	150 (3%)
Students with registered DSA	1450 (16%)	670 (14%)
No known disability	9150 (84%)	4740 (86%)
Widening Participation data (WP)		
Young full time from state schools	1885 (92%)	500 (83%)
Mature full time WP	50 (16%)	5 (4%)
Part time students WP	35 (8%)	110 (6%)
Staff data		
Staff numbers (academic)	810	160
Staff numbers (non- academic)	1275 (340*)	375 (135*)
*Professional and Associate Professional occupation		
% indicates percentage of intake for that category		

³⁷ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-1-2016-17>

It is interesting to note from the HESA data, the differences between the two HEIs, mainly the higher numbers of students at Keele University who are from outside the UK and whose ethnicity is Black, Asian, Mixed or other (26%). The wider cultural diversity at Keele probably reflects the greater range of courses available as well the close proximity to large more diverse urban populations in the Midlands. The HESA data does not indicate students who live locally at home and are classed as commuter students. However, given the close proximity to a large urban population in the Midlands and the very good transport links to the Keele University campus, it might be expected that more students at Keele are living at home. For students living at home, their involvement in the local university community and potential support maybe less (Thomas and Jones 2017) and this may be reflected in the student feedback on support. It is also important to consider that an increased number of international students may require additional support for understanding English and other academic skills needed for HE in the UK. Both universities in this research provide additional English language and academic skills support for students where English is a second language. Students at both HEI's are required to take a diagnostic test upon arrival and are informed about the support available. In addition, both Universities have staff allocated specifically to support students from outside the UK.

Cultural and religious backgrounds are important considerations when reviewing students support and the wider cultural differences at Keele may require more specialist support. In addition, at Keele the wider range of religious backgrounds in students is addressed and supported with the university Religion and Belief Policy³⁸. It is important to consider that the Chaplains and Faith Advisors on campus will also provide student support and will be particularly important for those students finding interaction with the available support services difficult due to cultural differences. At Harper Adams University, there is far less diverse in terms of culture and ethnicity (3%), although the

38

<https://www.keele.ac.uk/media/keeleuniversity/policyzone20/studentandacademicservices/APPROVED%20KeeleReligionandBeliefPolicy.docx.pdf>

addition of Chinese students coming to the university for their final year of studies has allowed more integration with students on campus and a wider experience for all students. Harper Adams University students have the support of a local Chaplain who can visit the campus when necessary. Widening participation in UK HE has been an important factor for students now entering university in the UK and has allowed the intake of non-traditional students, with a changing profile in both demographics and sociocultural factors (Small 2013; Webb *et al* 2013).

The HESA data for widening participation at the universities in the research shows some differences in the student entry with a larger intake of students (classed as under-represented in HE) at Keele University compared to HAU. This difference is more marked with regards to mature students with many more (16% compared to 4%) accessing HE at Keele compared to HAU. This, like the commuter students may reflect the ease of access to the Keele campus for classes for mature students and the availability of some part-time courses. The data for HAU shows a relatively large number (6%) of part-time students from widening participation backgrounds which is peculiar, given that HAU does not offer any part-time undergraduate courses, but this data may include short courses registering for an award over several years. It is important to consider the impact that the changing students profile has on students support and this will be discussed further in section 2.6

There are much higher numbers of academic staff per student at Keele than at HAU (1 staff to 13 students at Keele compared to 1 staff to 33 students at HAU). However, not all academic staff at Keele are on teaching contracts and not all academic staff act as personal tutors. The numbers of non-academic staff in professional and associate professional occupations will include staff working in the wide areas of students support, including both academic and personal support services. Both universities have similar proportions of students in receipt of the Disabled Students Allowance

(DSA)³⁹. Further details of the support services and staffing are given in section 3.5 and in Appendices 1 and 2.

3.4 The International Strategy for Keele University and Harper Adams University

The HESA data in Table 5 shows the much greater proportion of international students from outside the UK at Keele University compared to HAU. It is therefore important to evaluate the International Strategies of both universities and to see whether they address the wider pastoral support needs of this group of students within the strategy documentation.

Keele University has both an International Strategy 2015-2020 (currently being updated) and a Keele International Student Guide⁴⁰. The former strategy is mainly focussed on external promotion of the university overseas and encouraging international applications for both undergraduate and post graduate awards. One activity, the Global World Festival is mentioned in the strategy (section 6.2, p.7) which aims to showcase and celebrate the international diversity at Keele University and develop further a global campus. There is no detail on the strategy, how this will be delivered in practice through other initiatives. The information available to international students on the Keele University website⁴¹ gives information as to how the personal tutoring system operates or the pastoral support services available at the university, which is a shortfall in the essential information required for international students.

Harper Adams University Internationalisation Strategy⁴² has been recently revised but there are no major changes in the documentation since the research data collected in 2016. The strategy for HAU is very much the same as for Keele University, with an outward looking focus on developing further

³⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowance-dsa>

⁴⁰ <https://www.harper-adams.ac.uk/general/governance/display-file.cfm?file=Internationalisation%20Strategy%202020-25.pdf&folder=section3#>

⁴¹ <https://www.keele.ac.uk/study/internationalstudents/>

⁴² <https://www.harper-adams.ac.uk/general/governance/display-file.cfm?file=Internationalisation%20Strategy%202020-25.pdf&folder=section3>

links with other universities globally and in recruiting students and researchers to the HEI. The aim to 'develop greater cultural diversity and understanding in the campus community' (p. 13) which is to be achieved 'by 2025 to further develop extra-curricular activities for international students by linking with the Student Union to extend cultural diversity and awareness on campus'(p.14). Again, at HAU there is no mention in the strategy policy of students support for international students, although there is a named staff member (International Officer) in Student Services who is assigned to these students for additional support. There are many challenges that international students face when they come to the UK to study. Homesickness, language and communication problems, cultural and religious differences, food, life-style, educational background, finance and problems integrating into the university community which can all cause problems for these students. Whilst many of these are also common issues for UK students, it is important that the university policy acknowledges the additional challenges for international students and integrates their additional support needs into the universities wider pastoral support policy.

3.5 The structure of the support systems

The universities analysed in this research have very differing support system structures for students.

Harper Adams University does not use academic staff as personal tutors but has adopted a system of Course Tutors aligned to course area. Formerly the name 'Senior Tutor' was used but this was changed in 2016 as some students commented that it seemed too formal and intimidating. Course Tutors apply for vacant posts and work alongside supporting the Course Programme Managers in the running of the course and in recruitment. Where some courses are small, Course Tutors may manage approximately 50 students which may span two year groups whilst other large courses may have two Course Tutors per year. Programme Managers also take on the role as Course Tutors, often managing the final years of a course intake. Whilst the main focus of the Course Tutor is pastoral care, student progression, retention and success are also important elements in the support.

Effectively the Course Tutor is a facilitator, whose role is to support a student with issues they feel

they can support and referring a student on for specialist support, both academic and personal.

Course Tutors are allocated hours on their workloads, depending on the numbers of student involved and also receive an additional payment for the role. Whilst Course Tutors and Programme Managers work closely to ensure students support is provided, there are regular Course Managers Meetings which include all Course Tutors and Course Programme Managers.

Course Tutors are supported by a number of other support teams at the university, including Students Services, Academic Support, Learning Support and Careers Advisors. Within the Student Services section, there are staff supporting accommodation, finance, International officer Counselling, Mental Health and a Wellbeing Officer. At the time of the research project, a Student Services structure was not available, but the current structure is shown in Appendix 1. The only changes in staff since the research was started, has been the addition of a Wellbeing Officer, and a Students Casework Officer (to look into students with dispute or complaint problems). Other proposed staff additions to the service are shown in the structure.

Course Tutors can advise students how and where to seek support from the specialist services or students can self-refer. They are given promotional material during induction and the services are well advertised throughout the year. The introduction of a Wellbeing Officer was needed as a means of triage to support students initially and then refer cases to more specialist help such as the Counsellor or Mental Health. This was introduced because students were self-referring to the specialists where it was not necessary, causing long delays in appointments.

There is no guidance about how often there is personal contact with students but all Course Tutors hold timetabled weekly meetings with year groups and most will hold mandatory one to one sessions with students during the year to discuss progress with additional drop in sessions for students requiring support or guidance. Course Tutors at Harper Adams receive no training for their role but occasional training is offered in areas such as mental health.

Keele University allocates personal tutees to every member of academic teaching staff at the university.

Tutors are supported by a staff guidance booklet identifying their role as personal tutor and the services that students can access. Tutees are allocated within each of the 13 schools which contains a range of programmes with similar disciplines. The number of students that staff support will depend on the number of staff and students in the schools they teach but usually is approximately 5 – 10 students per staff member per year. Each school has a senior tutor who oversees the personal tutors in a collegial fashion rather than line management. There does not appear to be a whole University approach to personal tutoring delivery and meeting student expectations. Staff are expected to have at least two meetings with the students in the first semester with additional meetings as necessary. Again, there is no mandatory training but Student Services at Keele do offer workshops to assist staff new to the role of personal tutoring.

Student Services at Keele can be seen in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 with the former being the structure during the research period and latter being the current structure at the university. Keele Support and Development Services (SSDS) is located in a building at Keele University which is effectively a one stop shop for students needing support for both personal issues and also academic support. Appendix 2 showing the structure at the time of the research for this thesis shows three mental health specialists, six student counsellors and a wellbeing assistant. In addition, the SU at Keele run ASK⁴³: Advice and Support at Keele, which provides additional support services and can refer students on for specialist support within the University. Whilst there was no formal peer support system running at Keele University at the time of this research, a new peer support and mentoring system has since been implemented⁴⁴ to support students at all levels of their studies.

⁴³ <https://keelesu.com/advice/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.keele.ac.uk/students/lifeoutsideofstudy/welfareandwellbeing/peersupportschemes/>

In comparison, Harper Adams University, whilst having only 40% of the students compared to Keele, have only one student counsellor and one part time mental health specialist. Keele University also has four disability advisors compared to Harper Adams which has only one. Disability services, including additional specialist staff providing support for dyslexia etc. and academic guidance staff (5) and careers advisors (2) are not within the remit of Student Services at Harper Adams. All Harper Adams students undertake a year's work placement as part of their award and staff are employed in the Placement Office to manage the placement contacts and the employer data base for placement opportunities with academic staff who act as visiting tutors managing students with visits.

The advantage for Keele of having a central hub for all student support has meant that students requiring support from several specialists, for example accommodation and finance so can get the help in the same place with linked support and advice provided. The mental health provision support is located in a building at the edge of the main campus, mainly for privacy for the students. Keele also runs a nightline support service for students and there is 24hr coverage for students on campus in crisis with specialist trained teams, who can come and support the students within a few minutes. With a restructuring of campus buildings, Harper Adams has developed a building called the Faccenda Centre which houses Registry, Student Services, Disability Services, Academic Guidance, Careers and Placement so whilst there is one building for most services, there is not a central welcome hub and front of desk staff to welcome and direct students as in the Tawney building at Keele University. The staff in the welcome hub at Keele are also able to book appointments directly for specialist support required by a student and are able to help students change module options and access their student records.

In addition to pastoral support, both universities provide academic and specialist learner support.

Academic support in this instance, is defined as the study skills support and learning skills development that students may require during their time in HE. Additional support may also be provided for students who need learner support for specialist needs such as Dyslexia. Whilst

academic training is integrated into courses at both HEIs, it is evident that some students require additional help for problems such as referencing and academic writing skills and therefore may seek support from academic guidance staff (although in some instances, teaching staff may also help students).

At Keele University, Academic Support and Learning and Disability support comes under the Student Services department (appendix 2) and is integrated into the full support network.

At HAU, the Academic Guidance is provided by one full time member of staff and three term time staff. In addition, an academic member of staff in Engineering has some time allocated to numeracy support for students. Learner Support is provided by a separate department with specialist staff providing workshops and one to one sessions to support students with Special Learning Difficulties (SpLD) such as Dyslexia. The specialist learning needs of students with long term medical conditions and disabilities are also managed by staff in this department.

It is important to note that neither University at the time of this research, had an institutional policy or strategy documents on personal tutoring and pastoral care

3.6 Chapter Summary

Chapter three has outlined the information on the two universities selected for this research. The nature of the universities in terms of the student population, the range of courses and the framework for delivery of personal support has been presented.

The models of support in both universities studied will provide an insight into how both the systems work and, most importantly, into students' perception of their accessibility and effectiveness.

The very different tutoring systems, with one professionalised (Harper Adams University) and the other decentralised and arranged within departments or schools (Keele), combined with the different levels of resourcing, raise interesting questions for the research to explore. It may be that the different structuring of the personal tutoring systems is a function of the size of institution or

perhaps more historically of what works best for the students and staff. The primary focus of the research is to concentrate on evaluating perception of pastoral support for students' personal issues and not academic support. However, it is important to consider the synergy between academic and pastoral support throughout the research process since many students may gain personal help during academic support sessions. It is therefore necessary to consider any student feedback on the academic/pastoral support interface.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the methodology and methods adopted to develop and investigate the research aims and objectives. Three distinct strategies are utilised within the research process, which will also include a scoping exercise to outline the nature of the support provision within the two universities in this study. Background information for the chosen research techniques will be presented to explain the decision-making process behind the study methodology.

4.2 Research Aims and Objectives

The research aim is to map out the range and structure of support provided by the universities, to analyse how the students use and value this provision and to evaluate how these two aspects link to one another.

The primary research objectives are listed below in the form of two principal questions and three subsidiary questions. Each objective will be used to evaluate the provision and perceived effectiveness in each HEI. The outcomes of the research will then be reviewed in line with both the individual institutional practice and the current research in the field of pastoral care.

In order to achieve the research aim and objectives, the following key questions will be addressed

- 1 What is the structure and organisation of pastoral support and academic support in higher education institutions?
- 2 How do students regard pastoral and academic support in the institutions with particular regard to:
 - i) Is pastoral support and academic support perceived as separate or combined?

- ii) Is it clear who students should go to for both pastoral and academic support?
Who is the facilitator?
- iii) Are student perceptions of effectiveness and quality of provision linked with the structure and organisation of support?

It will also be useful as part of the research process to consider the concept of a connected approach to pastoral care to further examine the continuous sequence of events in the support processes. The research will also identify any similarities and differences in the structure and provision of student support in the HEIs in the study and identify any particularly unique aspects which distinguish that support. Moustakas (1994) suggests that research of this type is most valid when the patterns and relationships are ascertained through prolonged engagement with the participants. However, for the purpose of this research, to study a range of students over the course of their studies (three or four years) and assess their use of pastoral support, would have made data collection and tracking of student progression, unmanageable. It has therefore become evident from examples of work by researchers such as Hoerner and Stephenson (2012) that mixed method approaches can provide an effective means of analysis. For this research, a critical realist approach was used, with a top-down analysis which is focussed at a macro level with stakeholder involvement, which is considered at all levels. It will involve a survey of formal models of provision and organisation of it in universities. This is combined with critical realist analysis of how individual staff and students interpret and access this provision, will be open ended and exploratory in character. This combines the insights of different methodological approaches and the diversity of evidence provided which gives a fuller, more rounded evaluation of the institutions and their policies.

4.3 Methodology

4.3.1 The Research Philosophy

The research philosophy detailing the ontology and epistemology of the research process and an outline of the research methods and strategies to be adopted has been given in Chapter 1.

This section will detail the rationale for the methods selected for this research.

This project deals with two fundamentally different types of data, that is, quantitative and qualitative data. Therefore, a mixed approach of both documentary and objective analysis plus a critical realist approach was both necessary and desirable. Research data collected in this way allows both rich and in-depth results to be obtained (Blaxter *et al* 2006) while still providing a reasonable approximation of practice across each university in the study.

Documentary and objective analysis was applied to the content of interviews and policies for provision of pastoral care. Understanding the student perception of these policies required an critical realist approach in order to understand their effect on the people that they are intended to support.

It is also imperative to distinguish between issues of academic and pastoral support in HE in order to carry out this research, even if the results demonstrate that students or staff find this distinction specious. Academic and pastoral support are commonly separated in terms of specialist institutional structures or offices. Student support is often a separate unit from counselling, and they frequently operate separately from one to one personal tutor systems. However, this research project seeks to analyse the extent to which these two aspects of student support are linked and how staff and students cope with problems that cut across both areas. Does the HEI deal with the problems separately or in a more holistic way? That separation may create a design weakness that generates confusion and undermines the quality of support for students. Portraying pastoral and academic support as separate and treating them as something provided by professionals external to the

students' course may discourage closer relationships between staff and students outside of the classroom, which is a key measure of engagement. Institutional organisations that more clearly link these two areas and encourage staff to know more about their students in a holistic way may provide more effective support for their students that can lead to better achievement (McChlery and Wilkie 2009). This research and the researcher's own experience indicates that there is a close synergy with students experiencing academic problems which then impact on their personal well-being, and *visa versa*. It will therefore be useful to evaluate how the various services within the HEI are interlinked and what impact that has on student experiences. The research questions will guide the types of methods used in order to collect the data for analysis.

4.3.2 An outline of the research questions and methodology

The research aim is to evaluate the of range pastoral support provided by universities and to ascertain its value and use by students at all levels in their study programmes. As discussed in detail earlier in section 4.2, the research involves a mixed method approach with student and staff interviews, focus groups and an online survey in the two universities described in Chapter 3. Each research objective will be used to evaluate the areas of consensus around good practice in the professional literature on pastoral care in higher education. The outcomes of the research will then be reviewed in line with both the individual institutional practice and the current research in the field of pastoral care. The two universities that were selected for this research: Harper Adams University (HAU) where the researcher is a Senior Lecturer and Senior Tutor and Keele University (KU), which provides the EdD research programme.

With the additional benefit of triangulating data sources, the mixed method approach provides a means to seek convergence across both qualitative and quantitative methods and has been developed further by researchers (e.g. Tashakkori and Teddie 1998) to integrate, inform and connect more closely the qualitative and quantitative techniques used. Triangulation is a powerful technique that facilitates validation of data through cross verification from two or more sources and is

important as it provides in-depth data, which increases the confidence in the research results as well as enabling different dimensions of the problem to be considered (Guion *et al* 2011). Creswell's (2003) concurrent strategy triangulation model is shown in Fig 18 below.

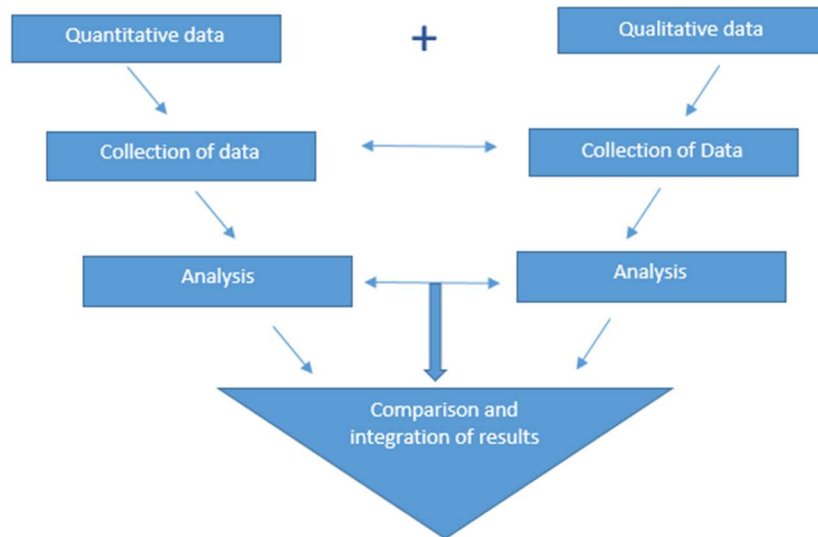


Figure 18. The concurrent strategy of triangulation model (adapted from Cresswell 2003)

The four principles of methodological triangulation outlined by Denzin (1978) which has informed and guided this research are given below:

- I. The nature of the research problem and its relevance to a particular method should be assessed and, where necessary, the method tailored to the problem in hand.
- II. Methods should be combined so that threats to internal and external validity are reduced as much as possible; so that particular weaknesses of one method is compensated for by a particular strength of another.
- III. The theoretical relevance of each method must be considered as well as the implications of combining methods which at first may appear contradictory.
- IV. Researchers should continually reflect on their methods, being ready to develop or alter them in light of developments in the fields and emerging data.

(Denzin 1978)

It is also suggested by Creswell & Piano-Clark (2007) that both qualitative and quantitative data can be merged to reinforce each other and that quotes from phenomenological studies can be used to support statistical hypothesis testing and results. The research will be both *descriptive research* (i.e. reviewing university policies and organisational structures), and *interpretative research* (i.e. student perceptions of how the support is viewed and experienced). Descriptive research was achieved through the mechanism of the online survey. The interpretive research element was achieved through both the survey and then through more detailed information gained from the focus groups and one to one interviews with staff and students.

4.3.3 The Research Data Collection: The Rationale and Process

The methodology of the proposed research consisted of four areas of data collection:

1. Initial scoping of resources at the selected universities answers the first research question i.e. *What is the variety of pastoral support offered by a range of universities and how is the service provided, organised and delivered by the HEI and staff?*

This information will be ascertained by both public information available (e.g. the structure of the support systems and staffing levels and access by students etc.) from the HEI and through interviews with key staff with responsibility for those services.

The three research methodologies used to analyse the service involves the use of:

2. An online survey
3. Focus groups
4. Personal interviews

These approaches will all provide evidence to help answer the second research question.

How is the service provided used, perceived and experienced by students at all levels?

Each of the methods of data collection provides information to analyse at both macro and micro levels. This will range from general feedback on student profiles and use of the

resources to more detailed information about access, marketing, confidence and individual students accounts of their experience. The rationale for using these methods of data collection has been discussed in section 4.3.1.

All the outline questions used for the focus groups and interviews were piloted with other volunteers to ensure understanding and were fully approved by the Ethics Committee at Keele University for this research.

The key issues surrounding this evaluation of pastoral support include:

- Provision and type of support at the HEI.
- Signposting of support for students.
- Facilitators of information. To whom do the students approach in the first instance?
- Confidentiality. How much do students feel they can approach staff with sensitive personal issues?
- Mitigating circumstances: what allowances are made for students with personal problems?
- Are the HEIs meeting the expectations of students and are these expectations unrealistic within the academic setting of universities?
- What specialist advice is available with the HEI (e.g. mental health, bereavement counselling etc.)?
- To what extent are pastoral and academic support integrated or delivered separately?
- Widening participation and Special Learning Difficulties (SpLD). How have the increase in student numbers and a wider recognition and improved identification of students with special learning difficulties impacted on pastoral support?

The scoping exercise of each HEI on the nature and delivery of support resources provides a clear picture of provision and access facilities from the HEIs organisational perspective. It was useful to review the range and accessibility of the pastoral support at each of the universities as well as whether there are future plans to change policy and practice, particularly in regard to feedback from

students on the service provided both from within the institutions own monitoring process and results from this research. McChlery and Wilkie (2009) suggest that in analysing the impact and effectiveness of students support, it is important to include successful students and not focus solely on failing students for support (i.e. fully inclusive and not exclusive for 'at risk' students in HE). This research will be fully inclusive and look at a cross section of all students at all levels in their education and not solely at students identified as being 'at risk'.

Some institutions have seen an increase in student numbers through widening participation initiatives, which has also put pressure on some institutions to review their support provision in order to maintain and enhance student progression. According to the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)⁴⁵, counselling services in universities have also substantially increased over time and the pressure on centralised support services is stronger than it has ever been.

4.4 The Thesis Proposal Pilot

As part of the initial proposal for this research project, a pilot study was undertaken to develop and test the online questions to ensure that they were clearly understood by participants and that the answers to the questions would provide the evidence to achieve the research objectives. The pilot took place with a small group of students at Harper Adams University where the researcher works as a Senior Lecturer.

4.4.1 The pilot protocol

The online survey design and approach followed a structured format set out below:

⁴⁵ BACP 2019: www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2019/6-march-counselling-helps-students-in-distress-access-opportunities-available-at-university/

1. Devising a set of questions and the options for responding to these questions (e.g. discrete options or a range of choices for closed questions; a text box for open questions)
2. Delivering the questions in an online format
 3. Publicising and promoting the survey to achieve a suitable, balanced, representative sample of respondents from a target population
 4. Collecting the data
 5. Analysing the data

The questions were designed and developed following the standard formats of asking individuals about themselves and then further questions about their awareness and use of support within their HEI. The literature regarding good survey and question design (Thayer-Hart *et al* 2010 and Creswell 2009) were consulted and applied extensively in the pilot development process.

- **Questions 1 - 3** were about the students (age, sex and year of study). This was used so data about use and levels of support could be linked to students who maybe are young, struggle adjusting to university life away from home or in later years with more pressure on achievement in their courses. Age was not divided into specific groups; this was to allow more analysis to be done on the actual age given rather than a set of ages.
- **Question 4** was a free text box to comment on who they would approach for help.
- **Question 5:** listed the support agencies within the university and was to test the students' knowledge about their presence in the HEI.
- **Question 6:** this was to ascertain if they are allocated a named support staff (facilitator).
- **Question 7- 9** was asking about use and value of the support they had with a free text box to give an example of support they had accessed.
- **Question 10:** use of support outside the HEI.
- **Question 11:** Suggestion for other support services needed.
- Final section: invitation to join a focus group or to be involved in a personal interview.

A full copy of the questions used is given in Appendix 4

The questions in the survey were aimed at giving both quantitative and qualitative responses which could be critically analysed in several ways. The questions in the survey needed to be reliable, valid, discriminatory in nature, easily understandable, relevant and inclusive (de Vaus 2001). The survey was constructed using the survey tool Bristol Online Survey which is a widely used online survey method in universities.

The sample set of students selected for the online survey pilot was a Business suite of courses at Harper Adams University, which included all years for both BSc and Foundation degrees as well as Postgraduate students on one and two year Masters courses.

Before the pilot was formally launched, the survey was pre-tested on five volunteer final year students in another course area at the HEI who gave verbal feedback at an informal meeting. This initial feedback helped ensure that the respondents could use the survey easily and that they understood the questions and gave the responses required. This was found to be a really useful exercise and as a result of the feedback, several changes were implemented before the final survey was launched.

4.4.2 Evaluation of the pilot

One issue that arose from the pilot was the terminology and use of support service titles. In the pre-pilot session, there was no issue about using the term '*pastoral support*' as it is widely used within HAU. Consideration was therefore given for the online survey to be used with other universities which are less familiar with the term 'pastoral'. It was suggested that both the term *pastoral* and *personal* support are used in the research information to inform participants better. Terminology has been identified by Thayer-Hart *et al* (2010) who suggest that 'Respondents' abilities to provide accurate and useful information are enhanced when they can immediately understand what is being asked and the purpose of the question. Evans and Mathur (2005) also suggest the use of pop-ups

within online surveys which can be accessed by the participant are useful if the question is not understood. This was considered but at the time, the technology could not support this option.

The response rate of 48% for the online pilot survey was considerably higher than expected, mostly due to the support of staff encouraging students to complete the survey. The literature quotes a wide range of figures for response rates, sometimes as low as 20% (which would be seen as typical) but Thayer-Hart *et al* (2010) suggest response rates of 60 - 70% in surveys at the University of Wisconsin, which is very high. Higher response rates may also reflect the nature of the HEI in this pilot being small and specialist provider. Response rates in larger HEIs may not be as high and may also depend on the course area selected for survey.

Another question which needed review was the question on gender. Initially the question on gender was an option from: *Male, female or I would prefer not to answer*. However, following the pre-pilot and other examples on student information (e.g. UCAS) asking for gender as only 'male' or 'female', this question was amended due to no respondents using this option. This was reviewed with further development of the question process as some studies have also shown that researchers also choose to leave this gender question open ended, so respondents can self-identify. Whilst evaluation of gender was a detailed part of the research objectives, determining which student respondents who identified as gender neutral or preferring not to describe themselves, was outside the remit of this research.

Timing of the launch of the survey was found to be an important consideration with the pilot taking place around Easter. Fewer responses were achieved from students in years 2, 3 and 4 which was thought to reflect the high workload pressure for students towards the end of the Easter term. With the addition of Dissertation completion at Easter and problems of 'survey overload' from questionnaires from final year undergraduate research, it was proposed that the final research survey took place earlier in the spring term/semester following the Christmas break.

It was also found that there was some confusion when students were asked whom they would approach for support for a personal problem. Some students responded in the pilot about approaching staff for support with academic problems. However, it is evident from the research of others (e.g. Yorke and Longden 2008) that academic problems and personal problems are often inextricably linked. This is supported further from research by Wilcox *et al* (2006) who investigated a total of 34 students at the University of Brighton using qualitative interviews to investigate why students leave university. A range of factors were identified by the researchers including mainly issues of social support for the students but some issues with academic concerns, mainly identified as problems with independent learning.

Potential weakness and problems in the pilot survey methodology were identified and amended for the final survey. General problems with online surveys have been identified by Evans and Mathur (2005) and Thayer-Hart *et al* (2010), but these issues can be reduced considerably by the pre-testing and design and delivery of the survey. The targeted audience for the pilot of students on a distinct course area (the sampling frame) ensured the correct sample group that accessed the survey. Students could potentially access and complete the survey several times, creating biased results, but since there was no monetary/prize incentives, it is unlikely this would have taken place. The final online survey was delivered across all courses and levels in HEI to ensure a wide sample size and prevention of any bias which may occur if students were sampled within a particular department where, for example, support may be particularly good or poor.

Online surveys also allow the data to be collated into Excel spreadsheets which can then be manipulated and sorted to compare data both within and between each HEI in the study. The use of spreadsheets also allows the use of statistical software to be applied to the data, which requires relatively large sample numbers in order to make the tests valid.

The pilot allowed a critical review and evaluation of the issues surrounding online surveys and the responses allowed further development of the online survey questions to ensure the research objectives were met.

4.5 The Data Collection

The collection of research data for the full project took place from February 2016 to December 2016. All student data was collected in the spring when the students were on campus and staff interviews took place subject to availability throughout the data collection period authorised through Ethics at Keele University. The order of data collection was the online survey, focus groups and finally the interviews. The rationale behind this order was to allow particular information from earlier methods such as the online survey, to drill down further for information from the focus groups and finally more detail from the interviews.

All data collected from the interviews and focus groups was anonymised and the recordings and transcripts were secured in encrypted files. No named individual is used in the research, students are identified only by gender (if necessary) and year of study. Staff were identified by their role in the university support framework.

4.5.1 Quantitative Data: The online survey

The online survey questions (given in Appendix 4) were developed through the pilot, to collect a wide range of information required from students at all levels of study in their university. This gave a broad overview (and in some cases some detail) of students use and views of the support system.

Following the pilot for this research for the required thesis proposal, the aim was to collect a minimum sample size of 100 students (sample frame) from across each HEI. The purpose of the online survey is not seeking to make inferences about the general representativeness of responses, but is seeking a diversity of perspectives on pastoral support.

As discussed previously in section 4.4.3, the online survey produced both qualitative and quantitative data. The use of the online survey allowed access to large numbers of students who were also asked to volunteer for focus groups and one to one interviews to discuss their experience of pastoral support, both positive and negative. The online survey provided a large amount of data for analysis but it did not allow the broader responses of student perceptions regarding the provision of support to be analysed as was possible with the focus groups and interviews.

The questions in the survey needed to be reliable, valid, easily understandable, relevant and inclusive (de Vaus 2001). The survey was constructed using the survey tool Bristol Online Survey (now known as Online Survey)⁴⁶, which is a widely used online survey method in universities. The main difficulty identified by the pilot survey was the issue of distinguishing between pastoral and academic support. The potential weaknesses of online surveys identified by Evans and Mathur (2005) in Figure 19 were also be considered in the research process.

⁴⁶ Bristol Online Survey (now known as Online Survey) <https://www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/about/>

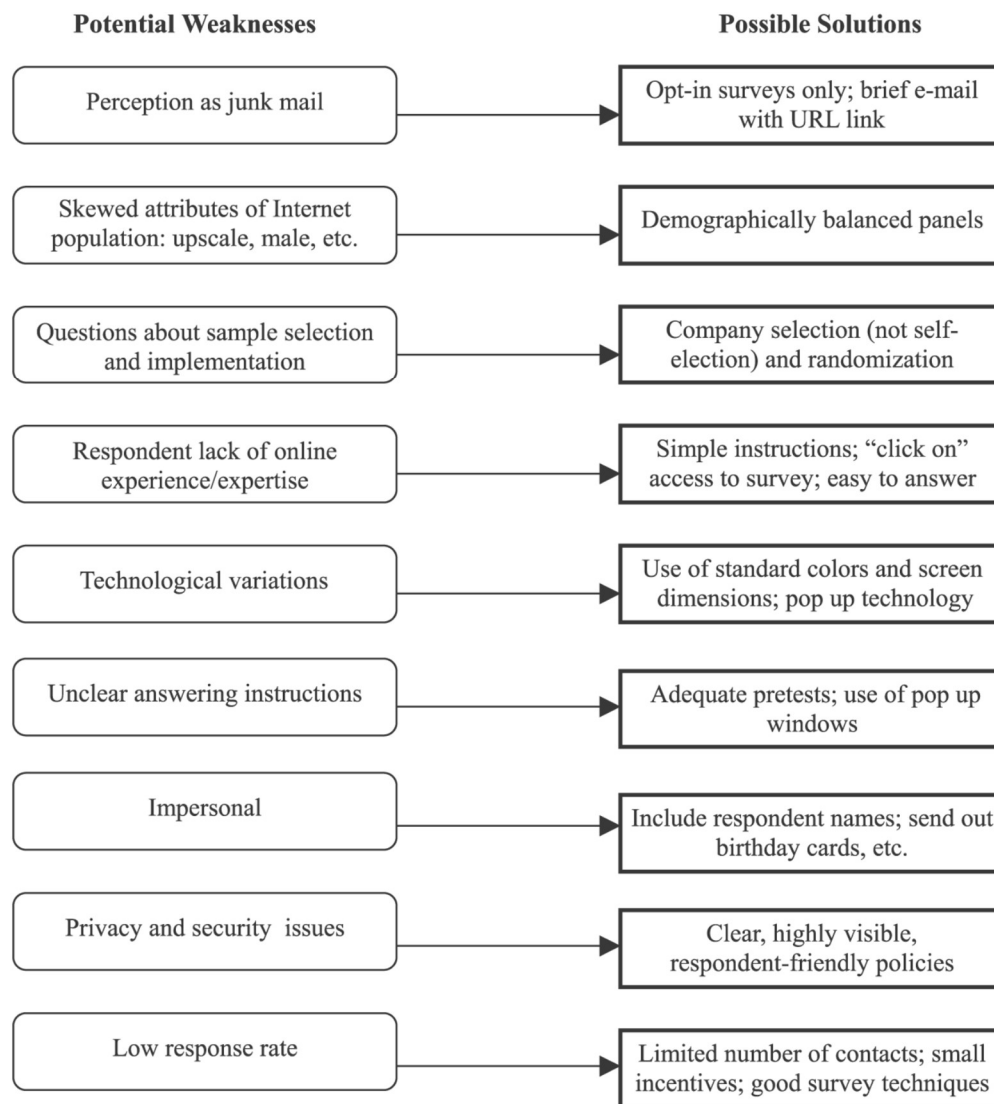


Figure 19. Addressing the potential weaknesses of online surveys (Evans and Mathur 2005)

All students at both HEIs in this research were contacted via the student email system after agreement with the HEI. The invitation to take part and consent information were on the email with a direct link to the survey (Appendix 5). It was important that the survey design was such that it was relatively short, easy to take, anonymous and relevant. The latter being important with the student focus on the questions and the feedback from the research findings being reported back to each HEI in the study. Tschepikow (2012) suggests that the more students consider that their responses will engender change by the institution, the more likely they are to take part in a survey , hence why it is

vital to close the feedback loop by sharing with students the survey findings and informing them of actions to be implemented as a result.

The response rate from both universities was disappointing given the full student cohort number of approx. 5000 at HAU and 10,000 students at Keele University. Whilst the response rate exceeded the target of 100 respondents from each university in the study, it was felt lower response rate was a result of the huge amount of emails students receive and 'survey overload' now evident in HE (Adams and Umbach 2011). Students in HE are now bombarded with surveys requests from a wide range of stakeholders including Students Services, Course/Module evaluations, the wider institution reviews and the mandatory National Student Survey (NSS)⁴⁷. In addition, both undergraduate and postgraduate students are now widely using online surveys to gain data for final year dissertations and postgraduate research projects and these are often targeted widely amongst the current students for their opinions and experience.

Biersdorff (2009) argues that it is not response rate *per se* we should be anxious about, rather the representativeness of respondents. The balance of gender and wide age-range of the respondents from both institutions in this research have allowed confidence that the information collected is both relevant and valid for the research objectives.

4.5.2 Qualitative Data 1: Focus Groups

In order to achieve more in depth and rich data both personal interviews and focus groups were undertaken. Whilst it may be more realistic to only use personal interviews, it was considered that there is some risk of bias in only using this method for personal opinions to be recorded given the small sample proposed for interview (3) from each HEI. Students were asked to self-select (volunteer) from the online survey and it may be that students with only very positive and negative

⁴⁷ National Student Survey(NSS) <https://www.thestudentsurvey.com/about.php>

views would volunteer which could make the results only a reflection of the more extreme views of students.

Including focus groups in the research has several advantages.

- Triangulation of the focus groups results with the data analysis from the online survey and in-depth interviews, will be more robust.
- More personal student views can be assessed
- The group dynamics in a focus group setting often bring out aspects of the topics or reveal information about the subject that was not anticipated by the researcher
- Focus groups are regarded as having 'high face validity', meaning it measures what it is intended to measure (Krueger 2002).

The research aimed to undertake one focus group of between four and six students at each HEI.

Focus groups are particularly suited to the study of attitudes and experiences whereas the use of interviews expresses personal experience and values. Using both methods for this research, allows rich and valuable insights.

According to Kitzinger (1995), the organisation and running of focus groups, needs careful design in the planning with both participant and discussion to ensure the investigator achieves the data needed and research outcomes required. Kitzinger (1995) suggests the interaction between participants can be used to achieve seven main areas.

- i. To highlight the respondents' attitudes, priorities, language, and framework of understanding.
- ii. To encourage research participants to generate and explore their own questions and develop their own analysis of common experiences.
- iii. To encourage a variety of communication from participants-tapping into a wide range and form of understanding.
- iv. To help to identify group norms and cultural values.
- v. To provide insight into the operation of group social processes in the articulation of knowledge (for example, through the examination of what information is censored or muted within the group).

- vi. To encourage open conversation about embarrassing subjects and to permit the expression of criticism.
- vii. Generally, to facilitate the expression of ideas and experiences that might be left underdeveloped in an interview and to illuminate the research participants' perspectives through the debate within the group.

(Kitzinger 1995)

Guidance on the running and the format of focus groups and interviews was used from several sources, including Kruger (1994 and 2002) Cohen *et al* (2005) and McNamara (2014).

At HAU, five students volunteered for the focus group whilst at Keele there were four students participating. Each participant was required to complete a consent form (Appendix 6) for involvement in the research project. The focus groups took place in a pre-arranged booked room with good access and privacy. Guided questions (outline questions given in Appendix 7) regarding the use and perception of services both for themselves and fellow students was used. The participants were fully assured of confidentiality in the discussion process. The focus group was used to ascertain if the students are fully aware of the services available and how to access them. They were asked in particular if there any problems in accessing support and what realistic changes in their university could be made. The students in the focus group were able to give useful second-hand insight through peer support of friends and others experiences of services within their HEI.

Barriers to getting support and attitudes to student's problems were also investigated within an informal discussion group. Participants in the focus groups and one to one interviews were anonymised and only referred to in the written analysis by codes. The transcript of the group discussions were made available to the participating students on request. Recorded copies of all interviews and focus groups were transcribed after all qualitative data collection was complete and used for the analysis and evaluation of the research.

4.5.2.1 Analysing focus group data

Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007, 2008.) suggest several qualitative analysis techniques that can be used to analyse focus group data. These are summarised below

- I. *Constant comparison analysis.* Also known as the method of constant comparison, this technique was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and was first used in grounded theory research. Three major stages identified by Strauss and Corbin (1998) characterize the constant comparison analysis. During the first stage the data is sorted into small units and coded using a descriptor. The second stage involves axial coding where the codes are grouped into categories. Finally, the third stage involves selective coding where the researcher develops themes that express the content of each of the groups identified. Constant comparison analysis is best suited to analysis of multiple focus group data where clear themes can be refined, and cross comparison of groups can be achieved (Charmaz 2000).
- II. *Classical Content Analysis.* This is similar to constant comparison analysis but uses smaller amounts of data which are then coded. These codes are then placed into similar groups and then counted. These codes provide both qualitative and quantitative information and are useful for mixed method content analysis
- III. *Keywords-in context.* This method developed by Fielding and Lee (1998) uses the analysis of the culture of the use of word. It involves examining the context of words and how words are used differently by people, particularly during interactive focus groups research. Keywords-in-context involves a contextualization of words that are considered central to the development of themes and theory by analysing words that appear before and after each keyword, leading to an analysis of the culture of the use of the word.
- IV. *Discourse analysis.* This involves selecting representative or unique segments or components of language use. These are then analysed in detail to examine how experiences and events emerge in the dialogue (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002). Words and phrases are examined

further to ascertain how individuals use accountability for their versions of experience's and events. Cowan and McLeod (2004) suggest that discourse analysis lends itself to the analysis of focus group data because these data stem from discursive interactions that occur among focus group participants.

Wilkinson (1998) suggest that most focus group analysts use the group as a unit and pay less attention to the voices of individuals which may not be fully acknowledged. It is therefore suggested that in addition to analysis of the text, that verbatim statements are included to clarify the themes selected and the proportion of agreement/dissent to comments should be noted.

It is important to consider another source of data in focus groups that is often neglected is that of nonverbal communication. This can be recorded through the use of video or recorded by assistant facilitators present during the focus group session (Fontana and Frey 2005).

Conversation analysis according to Myers (2006) is also an important element in focus group data analysis as it indicates how individuals in the group might modify their communication style due to the environment, in the case of this research, the educational setting. Conversation analysis is not just applied to the spoken discussion but also includes emotions such as joking, frowning and agreeing by nodding etc.

Whilst reviewing the transcripts extensively for themes, it was apparent that the focus group responses were linked to the questioning and related discussions in the group. It was therefore not appropriate in this instance to use any form of thematic coding or comparison analysis to explore the data.

For the purposes of this research, the two focus groups data collected was analysed through both descriptive analysis and discourse analysis which was linked to the questions asked and included direct quotes from the students themselves.

Descriptive Analysis, also known as Qualitative Description, is used in qualitative research for studies which are descriptive in nature and is particularly used in health care research. This method is used where a straight description of a phenomenon is desired or information sought to develop and refine questionnaires or interventions (Neergaard et al 2009). Neergaard *et al* (2009) also suggests that descriptive interpretation of the data from focus groups using this method is regarded as straightforward and low interference with the meaning making more sense to the reader of published reports. Whilst a thematic approach can be used for descriptive analysis, the particular themes identified from this research were guided by the semi-structured questions used. Using an inductive content analysis through the medium of Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2000) within the qualitative description framework allows the development of new theories in the responses of the focus group. It is clear that is doing so, a deductive approach can then be used to evaluate research and assumptions already published in the field of pastoral care.

A systematic review of the characteristics of qualitative descriptive studies by Kim *et al* (2017, p.40) showed that the concept of having '*no clear boundaries in methods when designing a qualitative description study should enable researchers to obtain rich data and produce a comprehensive summary of data through various data collection and analysis approaches to answer the research questions*'

From the literature and other's research, it is therefore apparent that methods best suited to analysing the data from focus groups were applied thoroughly and consistently to ensure both an inductive and deductive approach to analysing the research data.

4.5.3 Qualitative Data 2: Personal Interviews

4.5.3.1 Student interviews.

Students were asked to volunteer from the online survey if they were willing to take part on a one to one interviews. It was important to give the students a personal platform where they may wish to

disclose more detailed or sensitive information in private. Two students from each HEI were selected at random for a 30 min interview. The interviews took place in a pre-arranged booked room with good access and privacy. The interviews (outline questions are given in Appendix 8) with each students were digitally recorded on a dictaphone and then later transcribed into a word document for later analysis. The students were informed they could review their interview transcript if required, although no students in this study took up the offer. An example of the consent form for students interviews is given in Appendix 9.

The questions used examined issues raised in the online survey and focus groups to gain the more personal 'student voice'. Although the online survey took place just prior to the focus groups and personal interviews, the instant online responses allowed review of some comments which permitted greater depth in the face to face questioning when necessary.

4.5.3.2 Staff Interviews

It was important to include interviews with staff involved in personal support at each university in order to find out their roles and responsibilities and their opinions on student use, feedback and improvements for the service. A range of staff were approached at each institution and given the details of the research project (Appendix 10) The staff selected were from a range of support services within each institution as well as key academic staff involved in pastoral support. In total four staff were interviewed in each HEI and were asked their role, responsibilities and views on pastoral care within their own university. Outline questions are given in Appendix 11. Staff interviews took place in private staff offices and took approximately 30 minutes for each session. An example of the consent form for staff is given in Appendix 12. Support staff were not involved in an online survey or focus groups as the primary emphasis of the research was on student's perception and not staff perception of the service. It was therefore considered for the purpose of data collection, that a detailed analysis of support staff perception was not appropriate and that

interviews with specialised staff would allow them to give some comment about the use of their service.

4.6 The researcher's role and influence in this research

Given that this empirical research requires detailed evaluation and interpretation, the judgements and evaluations necessary to complete this research were underpinned by long experience as a staff member responsible for pastoral care at one of the case study HEIs. However, it is important to reflect on the opportunities and problems that can arise when collecting data from the HEI in which the researcher works. Reflective practice is essential to gain a deeper understanding of oneself, others and the meaning that is shared amongst individuals. Using the Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (Gibb 1988), learning experiences can be given structure and from the experiences achieved, future action plans can be developed.

Figure 20 below shows the Gibbs' model of reflection learning

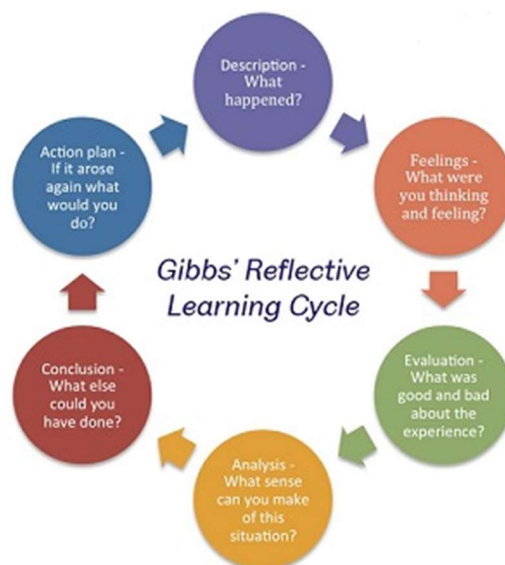


Figure 20. Gibbs reflective learning cycle (adapted from Gibb 1988)

Throughout the research process, it is essential to evaluate and analyse how the research process is progressing and what activities went well and those that did not achieve the objectives required.

During the planning and data collection procedures, potential problems and improvements were continually evaluated to ensure the research objectives are achieved. Further reflection on the research processes are given throughout the results analysis and evaluation in chapter 5.

It was also important as an experienced academic and pastoral support tutor, that the researcher in the interviews and focus groups proposed neutral , unbiased and open ended questions, rather than leading for predetermined responses. Using Brookfield's (1995) autobiographical lens, it is therefore essential to consider as the researcher, how previous experience has shaped reactions and responses to the data collection process and analysis. Also, in addition using the Brookfield lens to reflect on the students views and colleague's views in the research process and checking previous held assumptions by the researcher for their own personal validity and accuracy.

Subsequent reflection, after the conclusion of the research, has not revealed any area of the process that could have been significantly improved.

It is possible that a larger data set, gathered from more online surveys and further interviews may have influenced to some degree, the conclusion. However, the researcher was constrained by external factors and on reflection, does not believe any significant value would have been obtained.

It was therefore important to ensure that there were no students in the focus groups or interviews were those that the researcher knew or was directly responsible for at HAU. This therefore assured no prior knowledge of student's personal issues which may impact on and bias the data collection, analysis and interpretation. To further mitigate any impact, it was considered that using the mixed method triangulated design for collecting the data would reduce any possible bias from any personal roles at the HEI.

4.7 Ethics approval for the research

Consideration of ethics is integral to any research programme. The research followed the guidelines for educational researchers as outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2004) (NB: this has since been revised to a fourth edition in 2018).

BERA outlines the responsibilities that researchers have to participants involved in the project and these are:

- i. Making sure participants give voluntary informed consent
- ii. Participants are informed of the right to withdraw
- iii. Participants have knowledge of any detriments arising from participation
- iv. The use of incentives and their entitlement to confidentiality and anonymity

Ethics agreement was sought through Keele University ethics research approval procedures⁴⁸ where all copies of invitation letters, consent forms, questions, interviews etc. are reviewed by an Ethical Review Panel (ERP) and must be approved before research can commence. Ethical approval was granted in February 2016 and the first stage of data collection, the online survey commenced in March 2016.

Anonymity of the online survey protects the participants and provides a vehicle for legitimate, honest responses to the questions (Knussen and McFadyen 2010). It is important to ensure anonymity and that student will not be identified either in the written thesis or to the HEI unless they agree to this. For the online survey, students were fully informed about the research study by means of a research project details form, accessible via a hyperlink on an invitation email. Focus group and interview students were asked to complete an ethics approved consent form. All consenting students interviewed were adults over 18 years of age and consideration was given if a

⁴⁸ www.keele.ac.uk/research/raise/governanceintegrityandethics/researchethics/

student being interviewed was potentially at risk or vulnerable. Given the sensitive nature of some disclosures, the researcher needed to ensure that students were fully informed that if the researcher considered they are at risk or needed additional support, then the researcher has a duty of care towards the student involved in the research project. If any concerns were apparent then the researcher would be required to contact the appropriate authority within their HEI for advice.

Consideration for data protection in the storage of information was made clear for ethics approval and all digital material was stored in encrypted files. In order to retain anonymity all participants for the focus groups and interviews were identified by their gender and HEI for the students and by role for the staff interviews.

The use of incentives as a means to encourage students to respond to online surveys has been debated by many researchers such as Keusch *et al* (2014) as impacting on the quality and validity of the data collected. However, research by Cole *et al* (2015) has shown that in a study of 356 students in 622 US HEIs that whilst response rates did increase for incentivised surveys, there was little evidence that survey incentives negatively affect data quality.

Earlier research by Singer and Couper (2008) suggests that monetary incentives are increasingly used to help motivate survey participation and that some Research Ethics Committees have begun to ask whether, and under what conditions, the use of monetary incentives to induce participation might be coercive.

Whilst the decision was made not to incentivise the online survey or to enhance getting volunteers for the interviews by offering payment (which may have biased the data), a choice of a £10 Amazon or Waitrose voucher was given to participating students and staff after the interviews as a thank you for taking part and for their personal time taken for this research.

4.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the research methods used in order to collect data to achieve the research aims and objectives for this study. The rationale for the methods selected and evidence of testing the online survey for the pilot has been evaluated. The extended timeline in order to achieve the extensive range of data collection has been necessary and all research approved fully by Keele Research Ethics Panel.

Chapter 5: The Research Results and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the results and the analysis of the results in a sequential order progressing from the broader data collection of the online survey and then focusing down to the more detailed responses from the focus groups and finally the student and staff interviews.

The results for online survey of both HAU and Keele University students, the two focus groups of students in each HEI, the interviews with staff supporting students and individual students, are presented and examined.

The analysis will range from direct quotes to data presented in charts and tables. Statistical analysis using Chi-Square (χ^2) calculations were undertaken on the data comparing responses from both universities.

5.2 Quantitative analysis: The online survey

In order to fully analyse what is happening in each institution and how that varies across institutions, the data for each question is analysed both *within* each university in the study as well as *between* universities to make a comparison.

The data gathered from both institutions was exported into an Excel spreadsheet and sorted for the various questions used in the survey. Sorting also allowed the researcher to retrieve student contact numbers who volunteered for the interviews and focus groups. There were no names on the survey and all students were only contacted by their student email at the university. From each sorted spreadsheet, graphs and tables were developed to show the responses in a graphic form. In addition, the free text comments given are also analysed and interpreted to enrich the quantitative data collected. As not all respondents necessarily answered all questions the total (n) shown in the data may be less than the total sample for respondents for the full survey.

The details of how the online survey was carried out is given in the methodology section 4.5.1.

A copy of the online survey questions asked is given in Appendix 4.

In addition, statistical analysis was undertaken on all the online survey data with questions 7 and 8 showing significant results. The statistical analysis for these questions will be given when the results are reviewed for each question.

5.2.1 Online survey analysis

Questions 1, 2 and 3: Age, gender and year of study (Table 6)

Table 6. The age range, gender and year of study of respondents at Harper Adams University and Keele University

Question	Harper Adams University	Keele University
I. Age	18 - 47 (91% were 25 or under)	18 – 52 (93% were 25 or under)
II. Gender	59% female & 41% male	65% female & 35% male
III. Year of study*	45 x year 1 27 x year 2 27 x year 4 (final year) 17 x postgraduates	61 x year 1 51 x year 2 30 x year 3 (Final year) 2 x postgraduates

*NB: At HAU all students undertake a year's work placement either after year 1 for FdSc students or after year 2 for BSc students. For the purpose of collation and comparison all year 2 and 3 responses were combined as these student's study year 2 at HE level 5 (see also Question 7: Support and Study Year).

The results in table 5 show a high proportion of direct entry students (not mature) and first years responding to the survey. This is interesting as the literature (Tinto, 1987; Yorke, 2001; Thomas 2012) indicates that it is in the first year when most personal problems tend to occur, but this data may skew the results and underrepresent the views of students in further years who may also experience problems. Research by McIntosh (2017) and Webb *et al* (2017) has also indicated that mature students may be an 'at risk' group with personal problems and again this needs to be considered as an unrepresented group in the survey when conclusion are made.

Question 4: When you have a problem at University, who would you go to for help?

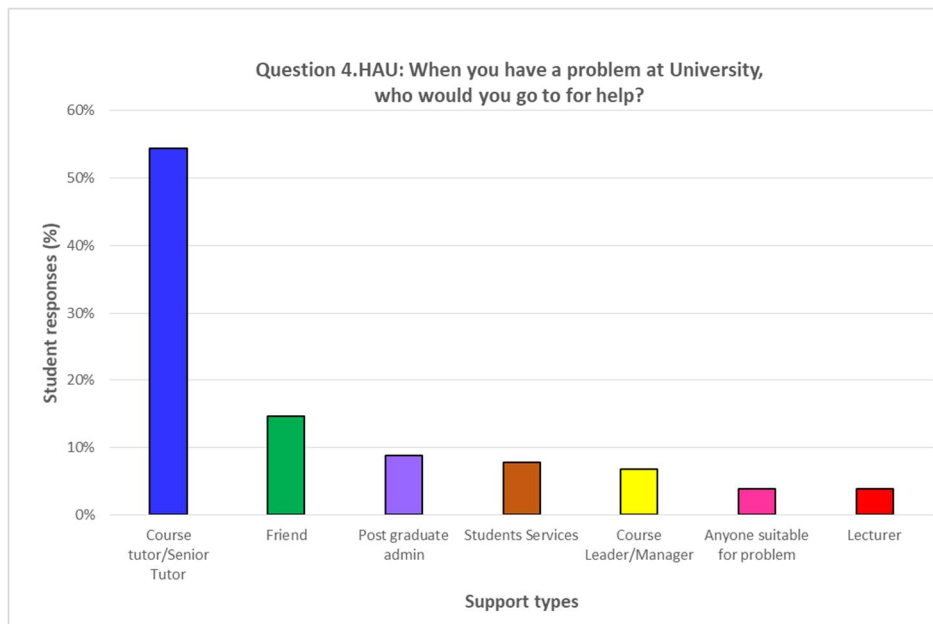


Figure 21. All responses to Question 4. HAU

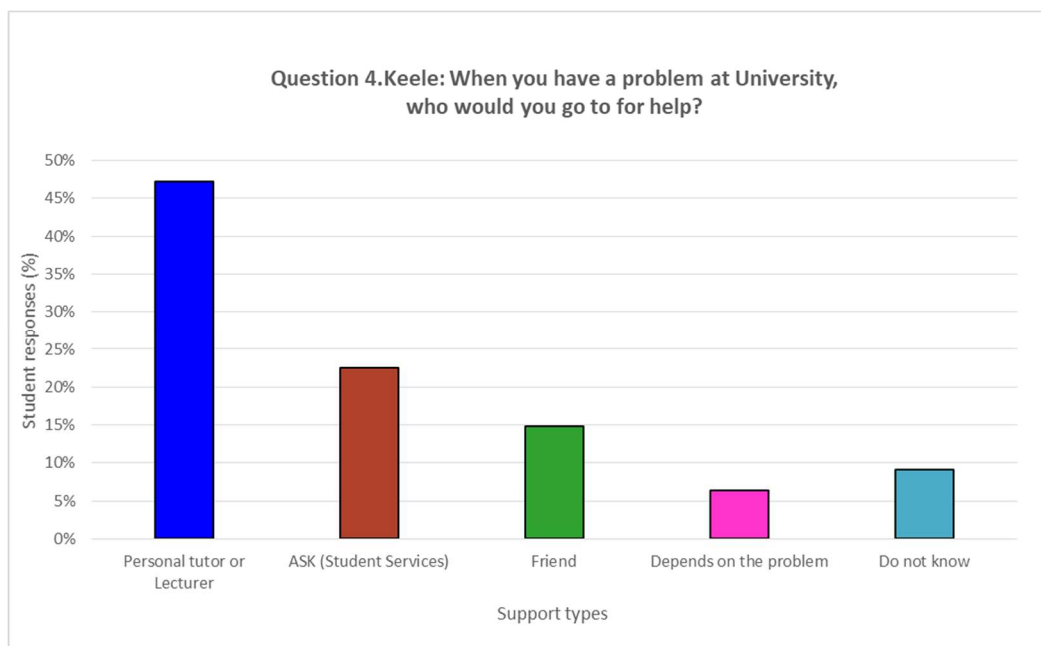


Figure 22. All responses to Question 4. Keele

Whilst the question appears open on asking whom students would approach for help, it was clear from the student introduction information to the survey, that the questions were focused on personal support.

The responses to Question 4 show a variety of responses but the majority of students (around 50%) at both universities in this study access support mainly from their allocated Personal Tutor or Course Tutor. As these are often staff that are familiar to the students, it is clear that they are the critical initial facilitators or sign-posters for additional support if necessary. It may also be that the student just wants someone to talk to for general advice (e.g. having to take time away from university for medical reasons) and they may not need further services and support. Many more students access Student Services at Keele for support than at HAU and this probably reflects the central hub availability and easily accessible online support booking system. This will be discussed further in the interview analysis (section 5.4.1.4). Approximately 15% of students at both universities seek support from friends or family which is perhaps lower than expected, but may reflect peer support groups and concern of worrying family at home, who may be some distance from the university. It is interesting to note that postgraduate students at HAU use postgraduate administration for support which is a friendly face they have regular contact with and so is effectively acting as a facilitator for support.

Question 5: Does your university provide support beyond Academic and Learner Support? Please tick any you are aware of

Table 7. Showing the list of survey options

Accommodation
Allocated Academic Staff
Disability Support
Financial Guidance
Guidance Counsellor
Mental Health Counsellor
Student Services
Other

Harper Adams University

The majority of students (>80% n = 116) selected Disability Support and Student Services, and Accommodation. At HAU Student Services includes accommodation and financial services so students might not perceive these as separate services they can access.

In response to awareness of the Mental Health Services and Guidance Counsellors, 24% of the students asked (nearly a quarter of responses) were not aware of the service. This might reflect their own needs and experience.

It is interesting to note that 35% of students were unaware of an allocated Academic Member of Staff to access for support. At HAU this access is via the year Course Tutor or Programme Manager and it is interesting that some students do not see the Course Team as part of the pastoral support mechanism. Of the '**Other**' responses, only one student named Chaplaincy and one named Careers as a source of support.

Keele University

The majority of students (>80%, n =144) selected Disability Support and Student Services, Accommodation and Mental Health. Fewer students selected Financial Guidance, Accommodation and Guidance Counsellor awareness which again may reflect their needs and experience. What is interesting from the responses to this question is that 38% of students at Keele University **did not** select Allocated Academic Staff as a service provided by the university. This response raises the question whether the students are actually aware they have a named academic staff member allocated to them when they start at the university or that, as they have not engaged with this support, they do not consider it part of the support network at Keele? This will be further investigated and evaluated in the focus groups and interviews.

Of the '**Other**' responses given, four students named Chaplaincy /Church, two named the ASK Service⁴⁹ (Advice and Support at Keele run by the Students Union). '*ASK who can help you with any issue and get you in touch with the right people*'. One student mentioned the Nightline Service for mental health support and Silverline which was a temporary service providing online mental health workshops. Careers advice, legal advice and a specialist mentor were also mentioned by individual students in the survey.

⁴⁹ <https://keelesu.com/advice/>

Question 6: Are you allocated a named member of staff who is available to support you if you have any problems (e.g. personal tutor, senior tutor or mentor)?

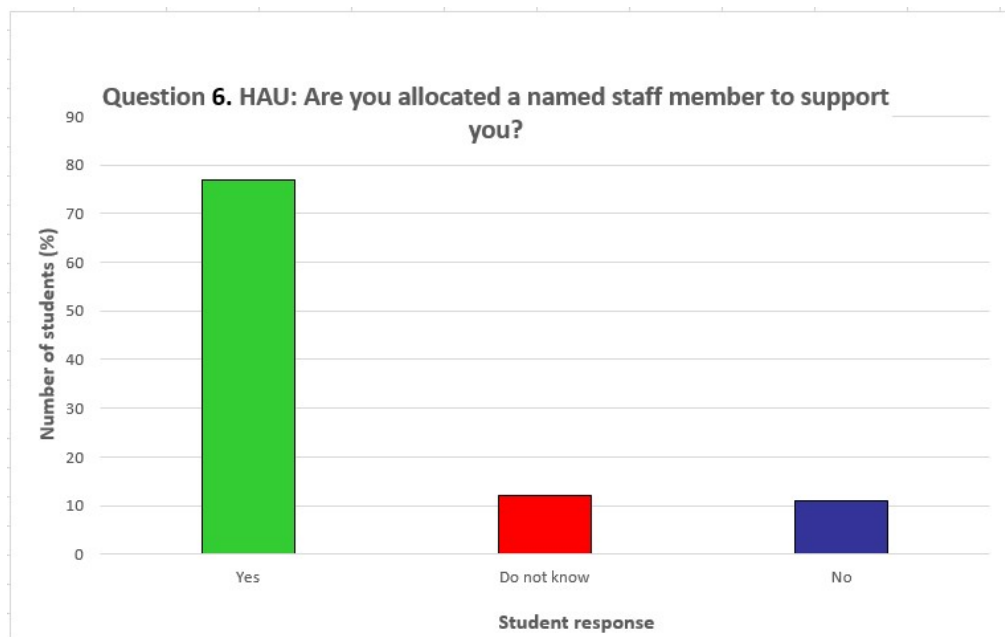


Figure 23. All responses to Question 6. HAU

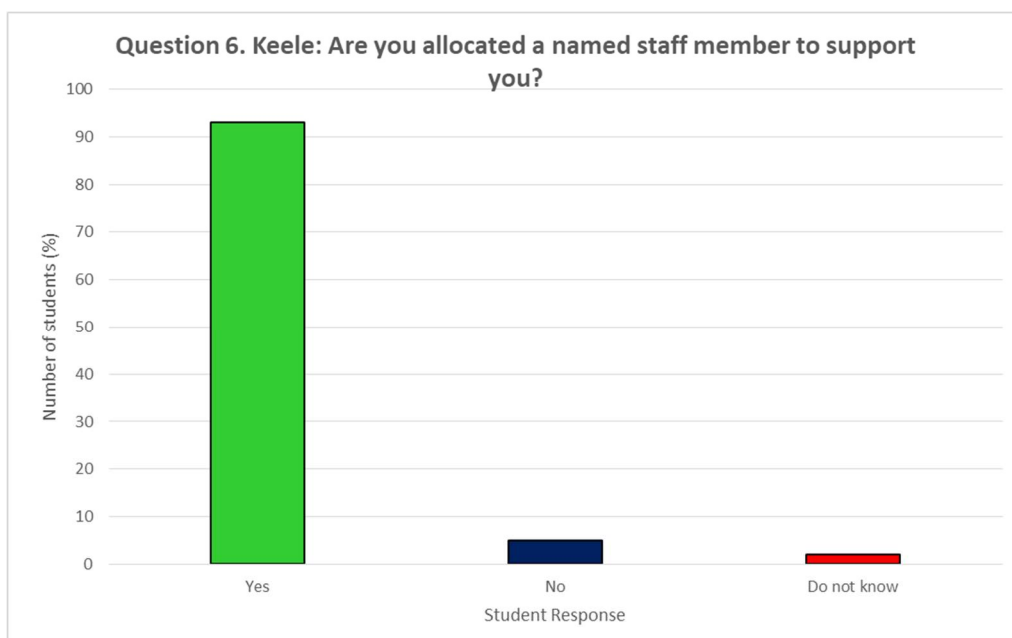


Figure 24. All responses to Question 6. Keele

In response to named allocated support staff, 77% of HAU students were aware of allocated staff with 13% responding 'No' or 'Do not know'. 93% of Keele students stated they were aware of named

allocated staff with only 7% unaware of the provision. This is an interesting response given the analysis of the previous Question 5 where 38% students did not identify Allocated Member of staff as part of the university overall provision of named support. This may reflect the student's attitude to an allocated tutor being more personal and the other support services being part of the larger support network at the university that are more specialised. This point is supported by information discussed later in the student interviews in section 5.4.1 and again supports the important signposting role of the personal tutor or course tutor in each university.

Question 7: The use of support analysed by gender.

The data for Question 7 for both institutions was arranged and analysed not only by response but also by gender. It is important to look at which gender may be accessing support more or whether it is the same between the sexes. The numbers shown are the percentage of students responding to each question with the total number of respondents given below for each gender.

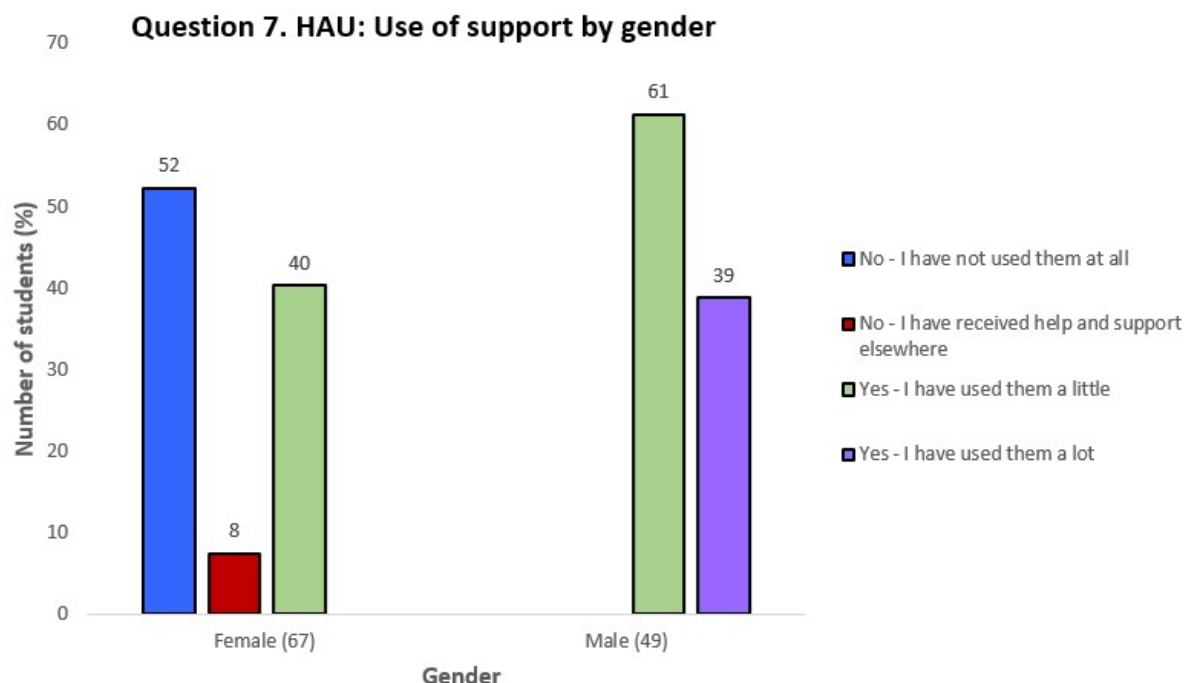


Figure 25. Responses to Question 7: HAU

It is interesting to note that whilst responses were higher from HAU female students, proportionally, many more male students used the support service either stating 'a little' and 39% of male students used the service 'a lot' whilst no females stated this fact. This result conflicts with later statements in the student interviews about males feeling less able to admit they have a problems and seeking support.

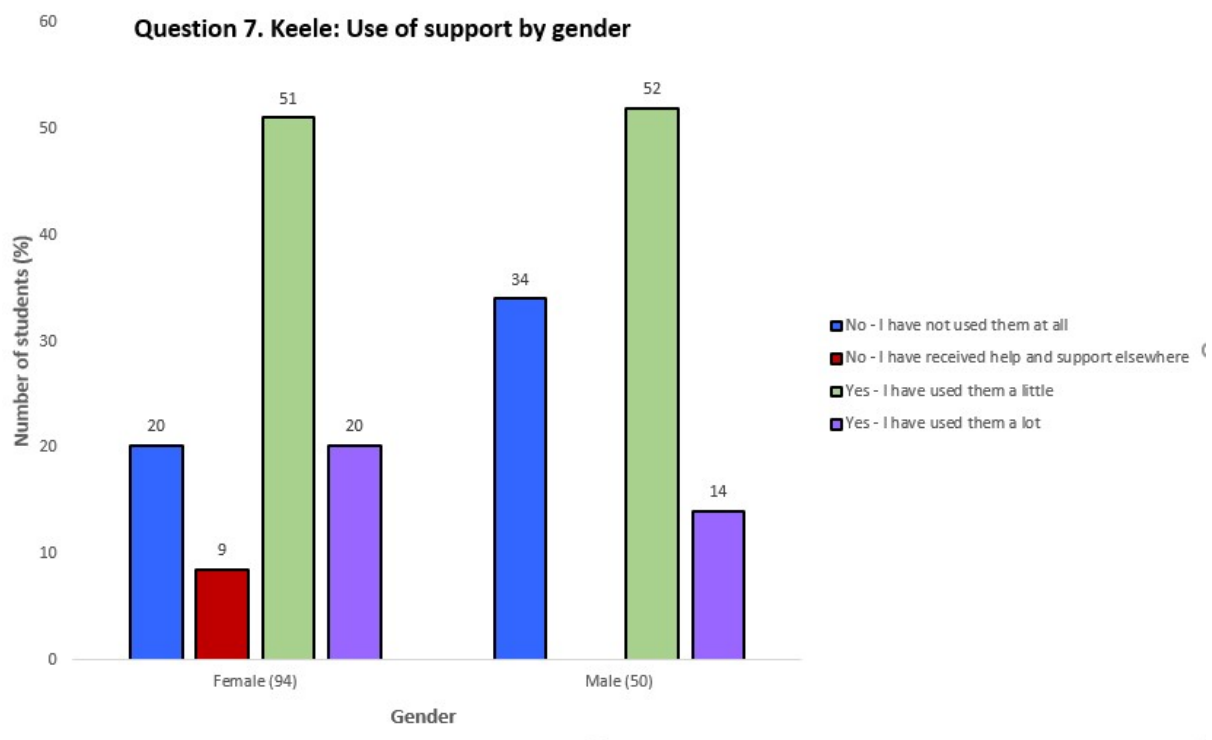


Figure 26. Responses to Question 7: Keele

The response from Keele female students to support was double that of males and the reply to use of support was very similar for both genders. It is interesting to note that like HAU, only female students at Keele state they receive help from elsewhere and this may reflect more engagement with friends and family. When Question 7 is analysed further by year, the use of personal support provides an interesting insight into perception of the service.

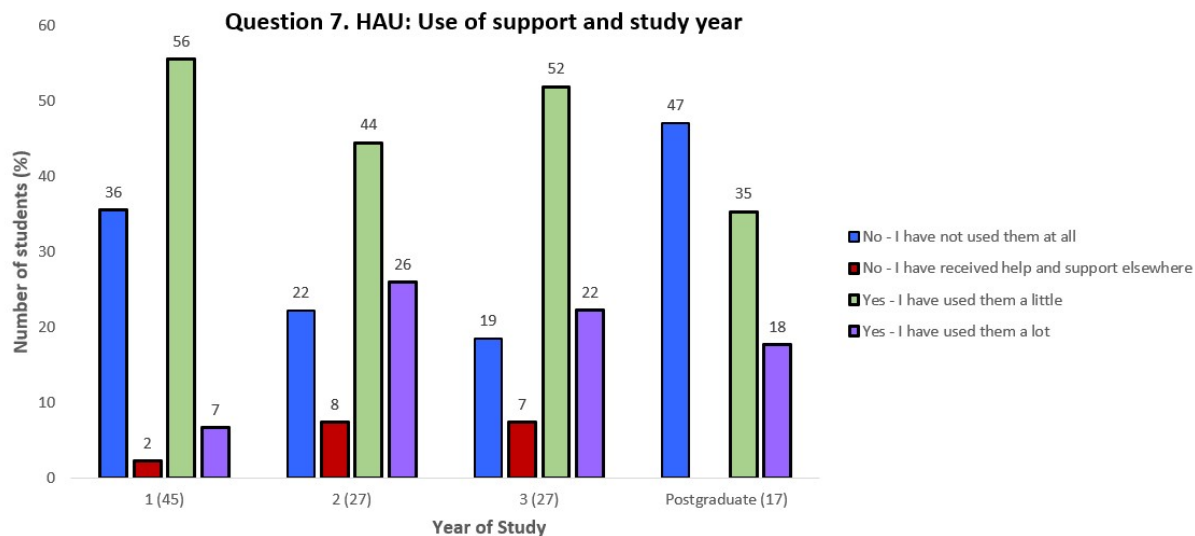


Figure 27. *HAU: Use of support analysed by study year

**HAU years 2 and 3 have been combined to year 2 to represent Level 5 i.e. second year at university. This makes both study sites comparable.*

As new students, one would expect more students at HAU to access support in year 1 of their university experience. As new students, facing the challenges of being away from the home support network, the different social situation, forming new friendships and additional problems such as juggling finances, all create new pressures. However, it is interesting to note that more students in year 3 (74%) access support when 'used a little' and 'used a lot' responses are combined. Year 2 also show a higher use of support at HAU overall compared to year 1. This may be due to the increased challenges in studying at level 5 and level 6 and perhaps other pressures at university. What is interesting to consider is the subjectivity of the responses and 'used a little' and 'used a lot' will vary amongst individuals. However, there still seems from the responses at HAU to be a greater use of the support service being used more frequently by year 1 students

Postgraduates appear to engage in some support and seem to be aware of the services provided.

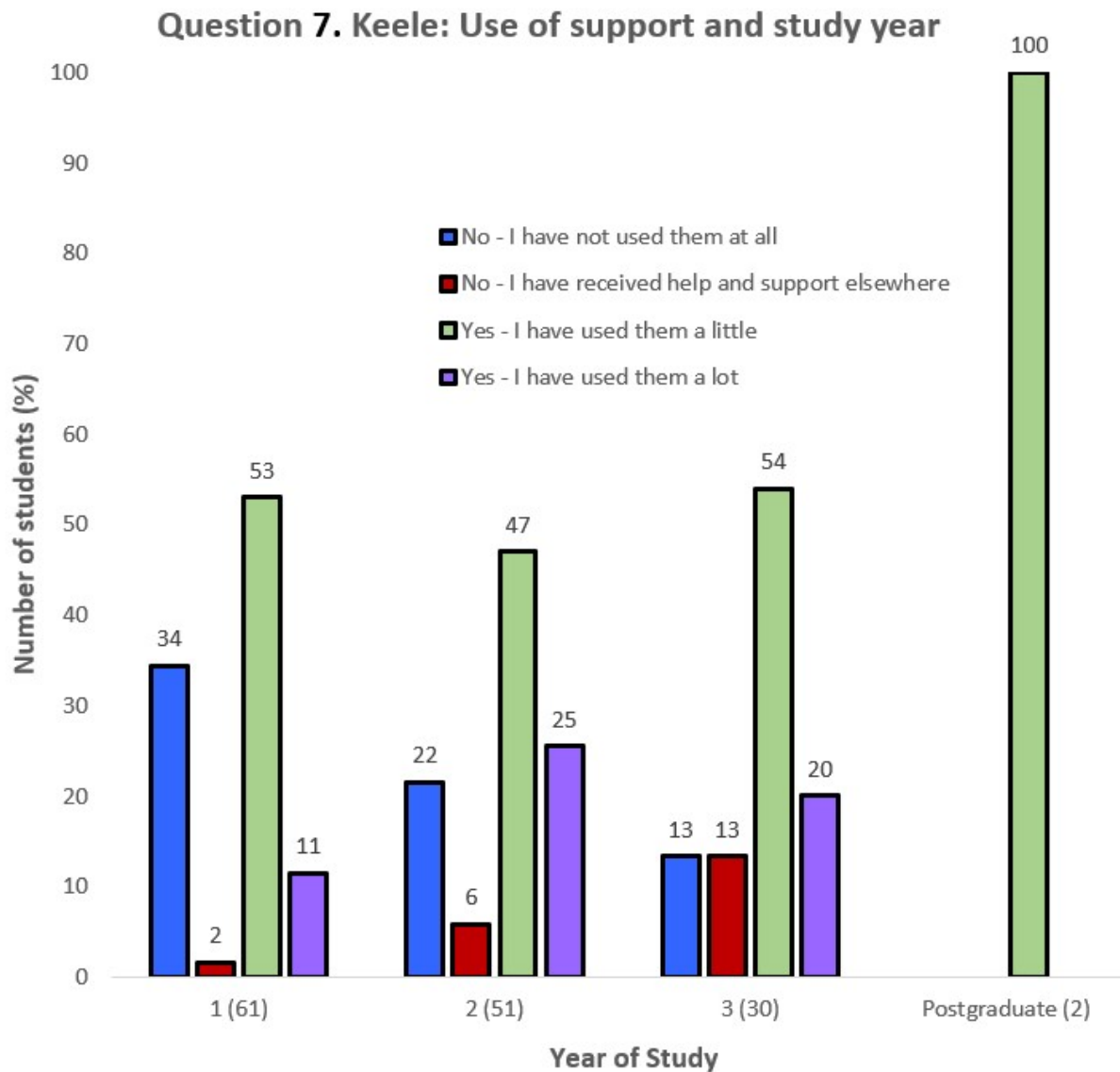


Figure 28. Keele: Use of support analysed by study year

Again, like HAU, more students are accessing support in the years 2 and 3 of their studies when the 'used a little' and 'used a lot' are combined. There is also a greater proportion of students accessing support 'a lot' in year 2 (47% compared to 44% at HAU). More students seem to get support from elsewhere as they progress in their university experience and this may reflect greater familiarity with friendship groups or online support services.

5.2.2 Statistical Analysis of the Online Survey data

A Chi-Square (χ^2) calculation was completed on all the data variables both within and between both HEIs in this study. Chi-square is appropriate when one or both of the variables are at the nominal level. A significant Chi-Square indicates that the two variables are not statistically independent, and therefore, are likely associated to some degree. The null hypothesis (H_0) was that there was no difference between the responses to the survey from different years, genders, ages to all the questions on the survey both within each university and a data comparison between the universities in the study.

All the Null Hypotheses were accepted for all the data variables tested except for two questions which showed a difference between responses from HAU and Keele students.

The two questions which rejected the null hypothesis were question 7 and question 8

Question 7: Use of pastoral support between HAU and Keele: Statistical analysis

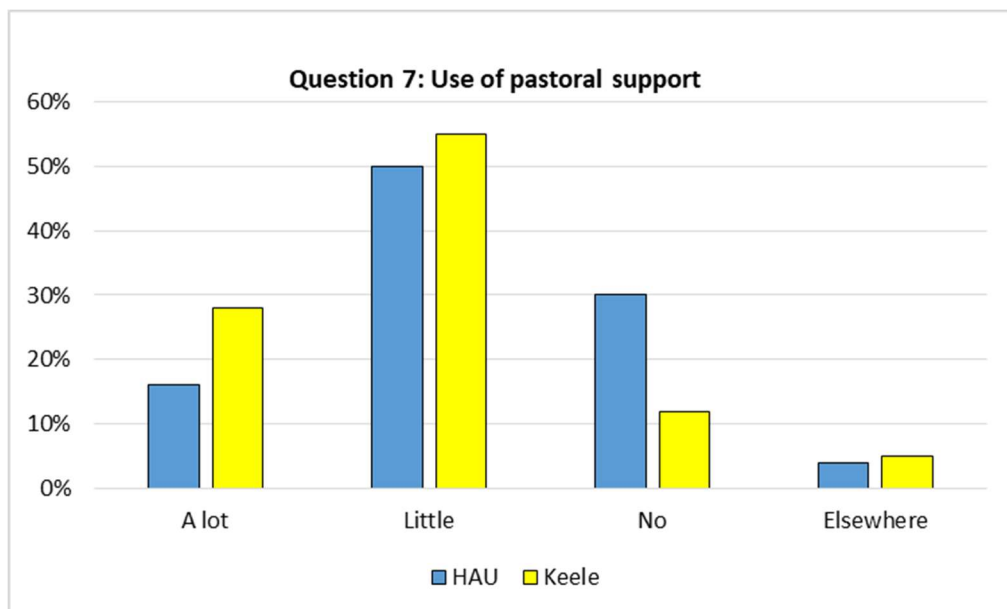


Figure 29. Question 7. Comparison of service use in both HAU and Keele

The Chi Square (χ^2) analysis showed a significant difference with P value of 0.01 which is less than the accepted P value of 0.025 ($\chi^2 = 11.2$, $df = 3$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is therefore that there is a significant difference between the responses of Keele and HAU students with regards to a greater use of the pastoral support services at Keele University than at HAU.

Question 8. If you have used support, how useful did you find the support and advice?

Students were asked if they valued the support; Not at all, Slightly useful or Very useful.

The chart below shows the percentage responses from the students that answered the question on the survey.

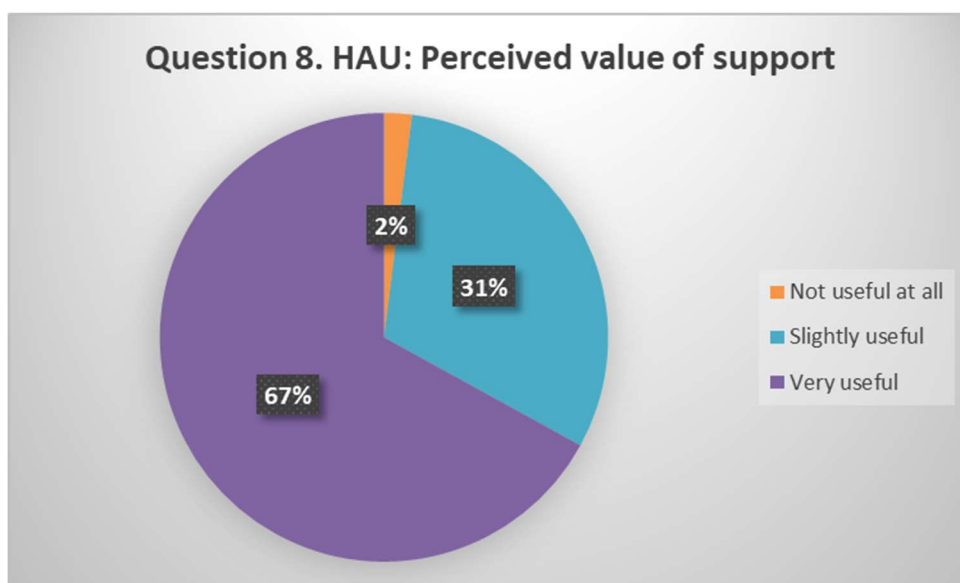


Figure 30. HAU: Perceived value of support (n = 84)

HAU student written comments (taken directly from the survey)

- I. *"Financial help from student services when I had a problem with my student loan"*
- II. *"Help with disputes between members of the hall"*

- III. *“Not for myself, I raised concerns with student services about the appropriateness and welfare implications of the sex themed hypnotist show for freshers. The risks for young folk of this should be clear. I do not feel I was taken seriously and it was repeated a year later. The welfare of the students affected by this needs to receive more attention. It’s not appropriate”.*
- IV. *“I was struggling emotionally last year after the death of a family member and the termination of a pregnancy, it was helpful to have someone to talk to, elevating emotional burden, enabling me to continue with my studies”.*
- V. *“Most cases I have had fantastic support, with home issues, finance, and personal issues, however I didn’t find the mental health councillor to be very helpful at all”.*
- VI. *“Didn’t know whether uni was for me, chatted to a tutor helped a lot, they didn’t push me in either way just helped me to figure out what I wanted”.*
- VII. *“Yes, my personal tutor has been brilliant helping me with issues”*

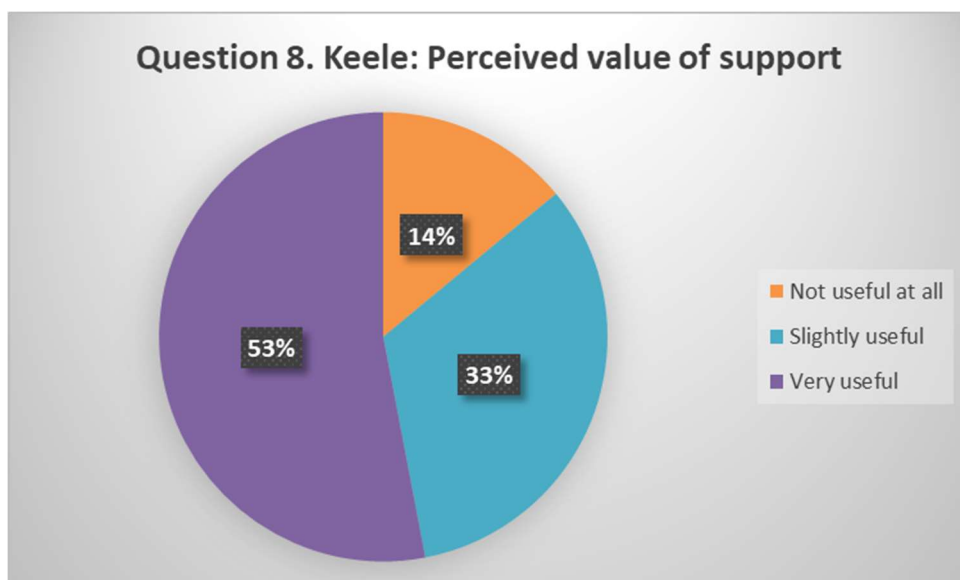


Figure 31. Keele: Perceived value of support (n = 102)

Keele student written comments (taken directly from the survey)

- I. *"When returning after a leave of absence I was kept completely uninformed about what needed to be put in place and every member of support staff I asked had a different answer"*
- II. *"Going through a difficult time, reported back to the university, but nothing happened to stop it".*
- III. *"Very little participation by my personal tutor. Has only met with me once since the start of my time at university. When I told him about an issue I had impeding my academic performance he gave a snide sarcastic response. Overall wish I could change tutor as I hope others are better".*
- IV. *"My therapist was useless but the staff in my school and also student services are great"*
- V. *"I have been seeing a mental health counsellor which has been really helpful and it was great that I could do this on campus. Amazing service"*
- VI. *"My work with the Student Support team has been great from coming to my room during a panic attack. My counselling is more up and down".*
- VII. *"I have had an attempt at life. I have been supported so much. I am happier".*

More students at Harper Adams University seem to find the support service useful with more students at Keele University stating they are dissatisfied with the support they experienced.

The situation with more dissatisfaction at Keele may be a result of using a wide range of academic staff for the role of personal tutors across the University. This could account for the variation in service at Keele, with poor provision for some students. This feature is explored further, in the focus groups and interviews with students.

Question 8: Perceived value of support between HAU and Keele: Statistical analysis

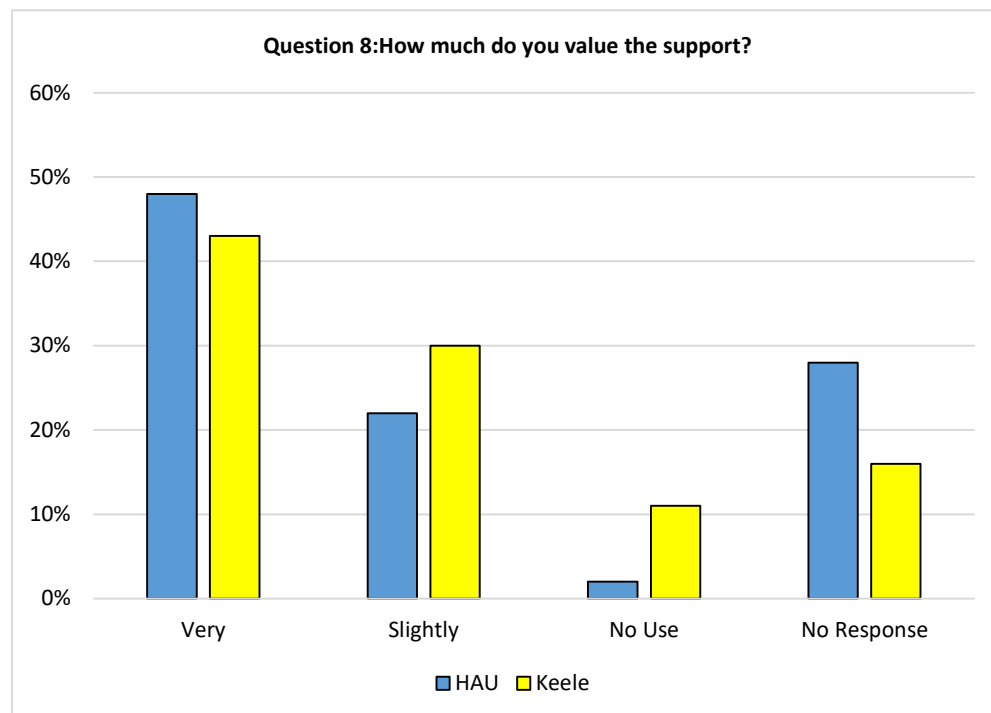


Figure 32. Question 8: Comparison of the perceived value of support services use in both HAU and Keele

The Chi Square (χ^2) analysis showed a significant difference with P value of 0.007 which is less than the accepted P value of 0.01 ($\chi^2 = 12.2$, $df = 3$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is therefore that there is a significant difference between the responses of Keele and HAU students with regards to the perception of value of the support services with Keele students who have used the service being more dissatisfied with the service than HAU students.

It therefore seems that whilst many more students are accessing the support services at Keele, a greater proportion of students are valuing the service less than HAU students (who appear to use the service less (Question 7)).

Both the results from questions 7 and 8 will be examined in more detail through the focus groups and interviews both with students and staff as the stakeholders.

Question 9: Would you use the service again?

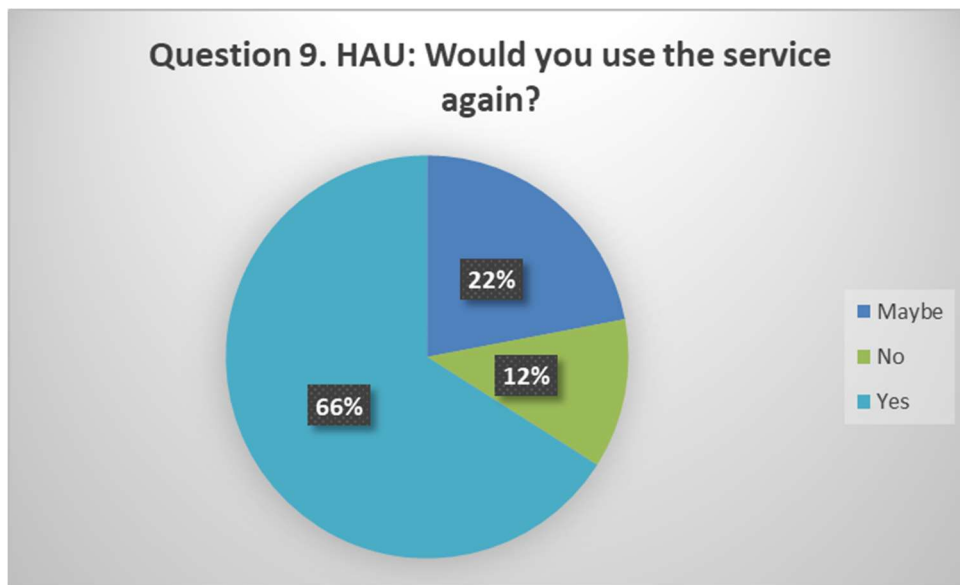


Figure 33. HAU: Would you use the service again? (n = 116)

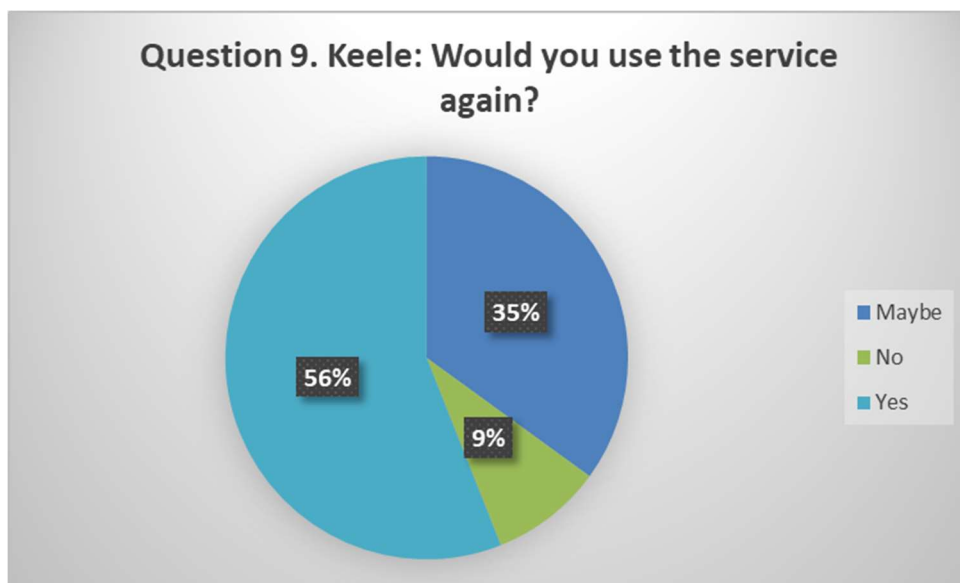


Figure 34. Keele: Would you use the service again? (n = 102)

It is interesting to note when asked about using the support service again, whilst 66% of HAU compared to 56% at Keele said yes they would, only 22% at HAU said maybe compared to 35% at Keele University. Levels of dissatisfaction and not using the service again were similar in both universities. This seems to suggest that whilst Keele students are less likely to use the service again compared to HAU, there is a higher proportion of Keele students who might seek support again in the future if necessary.

Question 10: Where else have you received support?

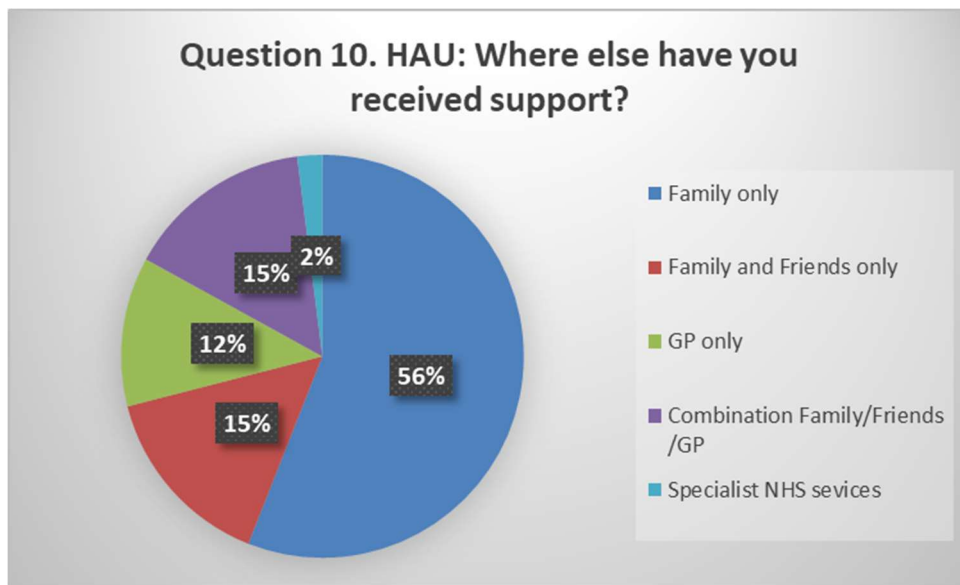


Figure 35. HAU: Where else have you received support? (n = 34)

Student comment: *"THE INTERNET! Google answers everything"*

This comment might not seem as facile as it first appears. The internet and social media are now being used more widely by students for access to support, counselling and self-help workshops.⁵⁰

Student's responses at HAU seem to indicate that 'family' and 'family and friends' are alternative or additional sources of support for some students. More than half of the students use only their family for support.

⁵⁰ Thousands go online for therapy. But does it work?. Observer Mental Health article Feb 2017.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/feb/12/online-therapy-thousands-but-does-it-work>

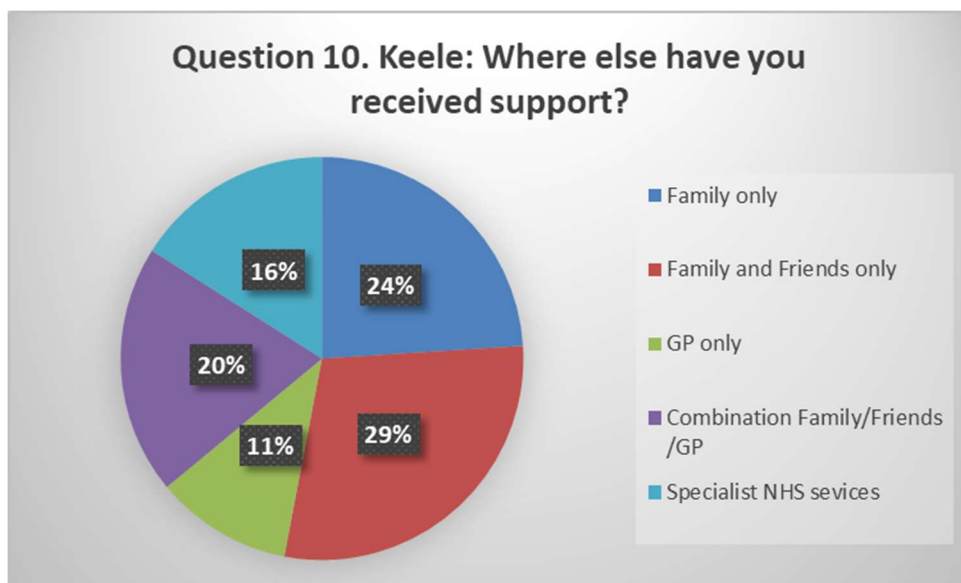


Figure 36. Keele: Where else have you received support? (n = 55)

Student comment: *"Having mental health issues I struggled at university and thus received a lot of parental support, I also sought a private therapist to help me through my issues"*

Fewer students at Keele University use only their family for support and have seen a greater support network of friends combined with family. More Keele students also seem to access specialist NHS services compared to HAU and this may reflect more home, commuter students at Keele using familiar local services compared to HAU students who tend to be more residential, particularly in their first year of study.

Question 11: Are you clear about the difference between personal and academic support?

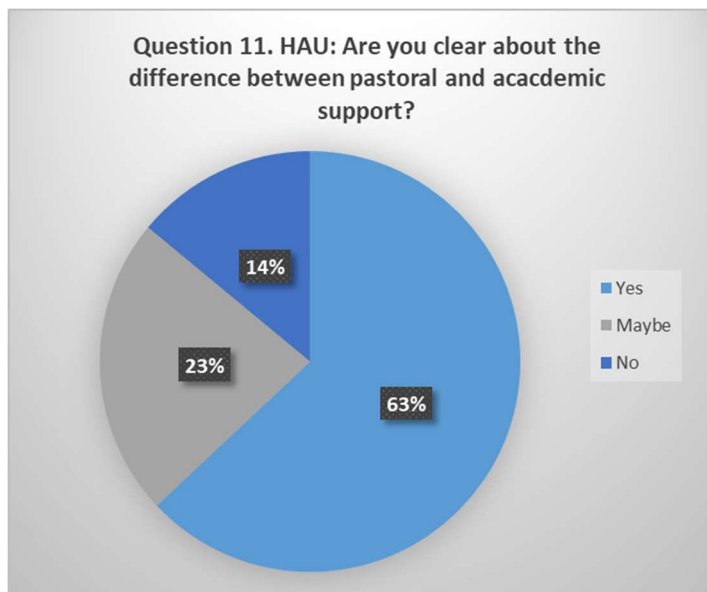


Figure 37. HAU: Are you clear about the difference between pastoral and academic support (n = 101)

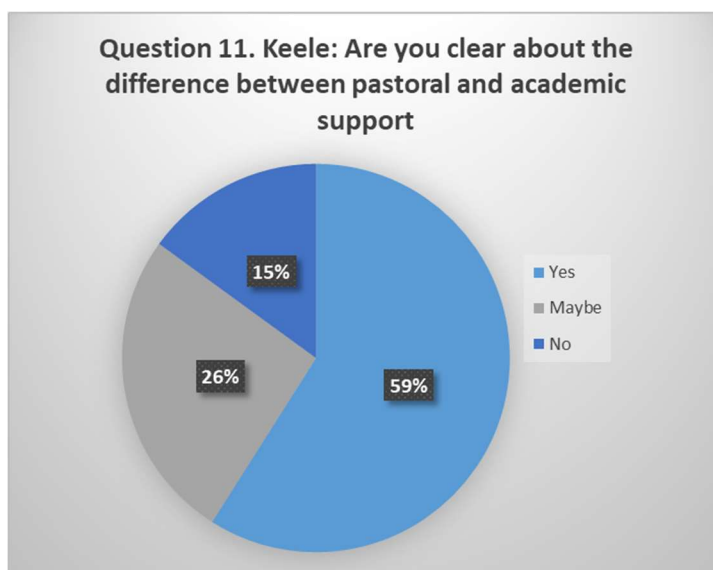


Figure 38. Keele: Are you clear about the difference between pastoral and academic support (n =142)

Similar responses were received from both the Keele and HAU online survey with regard to clarity on the types of support. This raised some interesting questions of this research which will be discussed further later in Chapter 6. Academic support, which is identified by the students in interviews to be the 'study/education' type support they may need. This may require a response from an academic for a specialist subject area in their curriculum or an assessment, in which case the student would

approach the lecturing staff. However academic support may require the students to seek specialist targeted Learning Support. For example, a students may need support to improve referencing or writing style, in which case specialist support would be appropriate. In addition, students with specialist needs such as Dyslexia, would also needs specialist support.

It is evident that if the majority of staff contacted by students (as shown in the online survey) are Personal Tutors or Course Tutors, provided these are aligned to the students study subject, they can in many cases act as both academic support and pastoral support. The two roles do not necessarily need to be regarded as separate and in many cases, as will be discussed later in Chapter 6, there is a close synergy in having staff engaged in both roles.

This is supported from two Keele student responses to Question 11 below

- I. *'A Personal Tutor can provide both academic and emotional support'*
- II. *'While obviously academic and personal support are inherently different, they are not mutually exclusive. Both ought to complement each other'*

Question 11a: Do you think they are linked? Please give examples

HAU: Of the 37 students who responded to this question, only five respondents thought there was no link between personal problems and academic achievement and the majority of the students gave some good examples seen below.

A representative sample of student quotes given in the survey.

- I. *"No because personal is home and academic is about learning and uni."*
- I. *"Yes. Personal problems can be brought on by academic stress."*
- II. *"Personal problems can affect the academic side because you might feel distracted with a personal problem and can't concentrate on work."*
- III. *"Yes – personal support is needed to ensure you achieve the best academic results possible."*
- IV. *"Yes, if you are not personally well, then it is bound too effect your academic performance. "*

Keele: Of the 63 students who responded to this question, only 3 students stated 'No' (2) or 'Don't know' (1) to their being no link between personal problems and academic achievement.

A representative sample of student quotes given in the survey.

- I. *"If work is causing stress and anxiety it may affect a student's mental health."*
- II. *"Maybe if personal issues are affecting you academically, therefore both types of support are needed."*
- III. *"Yes, student support can cover multiple aspects including academic support and extenuating circumstances, but also personal support in way of disabilities, learning difficulties and financial issues."*

Question 12: Do you think there is a demand for any other types of support in your university which would help students?

HAU: 45 students responded with comments with 29 (64%) giving the comment "No" or "All is OK"

Whilst the written free text was largely positive with no further action suggested, the additional comments are collated below

- A Personal Tutor for each student instead of the course leader (4)
- Better communication between Student Services and Learner Support since issues related to these departments do occasionally overlap.
- More help with financial management
- More group support sessions

Keele: The 78 responses from Keele students provided a variety of ideas to improve the pastoral support service. Some students responded with "*not sure*" (6) and a few confused suggested pastoral support with academic support such as "*more help with essay writing*".

Unconstructive responses such as "*Just improve the ones there are*" did not suggest how this the service could be enhanced.

The majority of responses (>50%) mentioned the need for improved access and more rapid availability for mental health support at the university with several comments about long waiting lists.

Other comments included: (numbers in brackets indicate numbers of students making similar comments)

- Easier access to counselling (4)
- Greater disability help/funding
- More counsellors who can provide Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)⁵¹
- More peer support and support for international students.
- Support needs to be more visible/advertised widely (3)
- More regular personal tutor meetings (5)
- On a very positive note is a comment “No. I feel the university is amazing and has everything you could possibly think of.”

5.3 Qualitative Analysis: The Focus Groups

According to Wilkinson (2004) focus group research is a way of collecting qualitative data, which essentially involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion (or discussions), ‘focused’ around a particular topic or set of issues. The collective form of focus groups allows the participants to openly and freely discuss ideas, opinions and thoughts. It also provides an economical, fast and efficient methods for obtaining data from multiple participants (Kruger and Casey 2000). Peters (1993) and Vaughn *et al* (1996) also identified that focus groups can increase the participants’ sense of cohesiveness and help them feel safe to share information openly.

Whilst Onwuegbuzie *et al* (2009) suggest that focus group numbers should range from 6 to 12 participants, it has been recognised by Kruger (1994) that small focus groups termed “mini –focus

⁵¹ CBT: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-cbt/>

groups” (p17) with 3 or 4 participants where participants have specialist knowledge or experience still have value.

For the purpose of this study and to ensure students felt comfortable discussing pastoral care , the decision was made to keep the focus group size between 3 to 6 participants.

All students taking part in the focus groups had volunteered as part of the online survey and were selected randomly from the list of students. All students taking part completed consent forms for participation in the research as well as use of any quotes for analysis following transcription (Appendix 6).

Each focus group at the two universities took place in a quiet room, without disruption at a time suitable for the students to attend. All participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality unless there was any indication in the discussion that they or someone else might be at risk. All the students taking part in the focus group had been emailed information about the research and the purpose of the focus group and participants were asked to sign a consent form both for taking part and for use of any quotes (Appendix 6).

The focus group participants were seated around a table and the discussion recorded centrally in order to capture all discussion and comments. The range of the outline of semi-structured questions asked of the focus groups at both HEIs in the study are given in Appendix 7. Each focus group at the HEIs took approximately 30 minutes.

The facilitator took the role of asking the questions, occasional note taking and ensuring all participants had a chance to speak. Overly talkative participants or those dominating the discussion were asked to let others speak and give their opinions to ensure a balanced view of everyone present.

5.3.1 Harper Adams University Focus Group

The focus group at Harper Adams University consisted of the following: A male student and three female students in year one with one female in year 4. The group interview was recorded and later transcribed. The facilitator asked a range of semi-structured questions (given below) and also took notes to monitor communication and behaviour which may have impacted on the discussion.

Question 1: What support is available to you at your university and how are you made aware of it?

All the students identified the services available at Harper Adams.

Posters, leaflets and the wardens in the student accommodation (halls) were the sources of information but one student (female year 1) commented:

“You need to be looking for support to find it”

Students also mentioned the use of Yik Yak, a social media smartphone application (since discontinued in 2017) which allowed students to access each other within a 5 miles radius and was therefore widely used on campus as a means to communicate information amongst the student body.

Question 2: How effective have you found the pastoral support?

All participants in the focus group had experience of pastoral support and one student (female year 1) was very negative about her experience. The other students in the focus group commented that they had found the support helpful. One female student in year 4 had a problem with debt and commented that no help was given about how to get support.

The negative comments by one student were mainly personal about feeling dismissed and the poor service.

“I made an effort to get help and feel dismissed – I felt one hundred times worse than had I not gone for help”

“Counselling good to rant but does not help with answers/does not show any genuine interest”

Whilst this student may have had a poor and unacceptable experience engaging with support, the second comment about getting answers may reflect unreasonable expectations of what counselling can do, especially over a short period of time.

Question 3: What about other support?

The general consensus of opinion was that a ‘buddy system’ using older students on their courses might be useful and was used to some extent at HAU for international students. Leeds University was mentioned as a place one student had heard of that had a good student support network and all the focus group participants agreed that some of the students societies were a good support mechanism as it included like-minded people to talk to.

The students identified the role of the Senior Tutor at HAU (now called Course Tutors). The response for the focus group was variable with some stating (2) some staff were too busy to approach and get support. They all felt that staff in the role should create an *“informal, relaxed atmosphere so students would feel they were approachable for anything”*

Question 4: Are you aware of students leaving due to problems/lack of support?

One female year 1 student had spent the previous year at a large university. She has problems and felt *“lost”* in a large institution. Another student agreed about the small university experience and stated she would have left without the support she had been able to access (student did not expand on her support needs).

Some criticism of Student Services was voiced by three students and the feeling of being *“fobbed off”* when they sought support. All students acknowledged the difficult role that Student Services have being in charge of discipline with student issues, especially around poor behaviour in halls/drink related activity and also providing support.

One female year 4 student commented on the stigma of mental health problems but acknowledged this was being much better recognised by the university. It would appear her comment was mainly directed at the lack of understanding from fellow students.

Some discussion arose from all the students about the challenging drinking and sometimes difficult social culture at HAU and *"fitting in"*. They all commented they were aware of this causing mental health issues and social anxiety, particularly in the first term.

One female year 1 student commented on there being a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) society at HAU with only 7 student members. Posters prompting events had been ripped down and students were afraid to be identified.

All participants agreed that when approaching staff for support it was important to consider when and who you speak to. They also all agreed that there was good support for bereavement at HAU but would only require support if it impacted on assignment deadlines etc.

Question 5: Do you think there is a link between personal and academic problems at university?

All participants agreed that academic problems can lead to stress and personal problems and vice versa. One participant (male year 1) commented on the fact that *"if a student has a problem and may not want to worry family at home and also them being a long way away and therefore them feeling helpless"*.

Question 6: How can things be improved?

There is a need for more societies and clubs that do not involve sports or drinking. A suggestion was a gaming society where it was suggested by a female student year 1 that it would help with social anxiety and provide a *"good community where students understand each other and can provide support"*.

All the students identified there is still *"some stigma attached to getting support and students getting help are being seen as weak and not coping as adults in university"*.

It was suggested that more proactive support of students and better monitoring of attendance would help. More staff with the correct skills are needed (*“caring/empathy/patience”* were words used) should be employed in Student Services.

What was really interesting was at the end of the focus group a female year 4 student said

“We are all strangers and I feel more open as you all get it – we need more groups like this”

Clearly she found contributing and listening to comments in the focus group somewhat cathartic and it is something to consider in the overall evaluation of this research. Perhaps small support groups of individuals can help students open up and discuss additional support and issues. This kind of forum maybe also help students understand that there are not always answers and that people do have different views and expectations.

5.3.1.2 Analysis

By reviewing the comments through descriptive analysis, the themes identified through the questions are centred mainly on the issues of access to support and support provision.

All students contributed well to the focus group at HAU and the general environment and body language of the students indicated they felt relaxed and open to talking confidently with other students they did not know.

The majority of the students were positive about the support provided at HAU and when asked about whether pastoral support should be provided at university, the concern of increasing fees and costs of HE were mentioned and that it is now *“expected as part of the HE experience”*. Whilst there were no comments made specifically about waiting time for dedicated support from the counsellor or mental health specialist, there were several ad hoc remarks that there were only two specialist support staff for the whole university, which seemed low given the student population of over 5000 students.

The students all seemed clear about the role of their allocated Senior Tutors as being the '*facilitators of information*' to help them seek and gain further support if necessary. Whilst students were aware of the Student Services provision, they felt seeing their Senior Tutor was someone they were familiar with and the person they approached first

It is interesting to note that no student mentioned anything about confidentiality in the support process but were all concerned about the stigma of being seen to access personal support, especially for mental health problems.

The students gave some useful insights and suggestions to improve the service at HAU but it was clear that there was some dissatisfaction from one student in particular (female year 1) which may or may not be representative of the larger student population. It was anticipated from the onset of this research that discourse from the focus groups would help inform and extend the interview questions for both students and staff.

5.3.2 Keele University Focus Group

The focus group at Keele University consisted of the following: A male student and two female students in year one, one female students in year 2 and one male student in postgraduate studies. The group interview was recorded and later transcribed. The facilitator asked a range of semi-structured questions (given below) and also took notes to monitor communication and behaviour which may have impacted on the discussion.

Question 1: What support is available to you at your university and how are you made aware of it?

All the students in the focus group identified that they were allocated a personal tutor from within their subject department and that these staff signpost students to Student Services for specialist support. The focus group were also aware of students who contacted Student Services directly to seek support.

It was interesting to note that the focus group participants did not mention the availability of support for financial advice or issues with accommodation but this may reflect that they or friends had not sought help themselves.

Question 2: How effective have you found the pastoral support?

The male year 1 student stated, *“he had no confidence and did not want to burden his tutor”* He also stated he was *“reluctant to see staff for fear of dismissal”*

The female students in year 2 have a very positive experience both with the staff allocated as her personal tutor and also teaching staff whom she also approached for personal support.

When asked about the practicality of changing personal tutor, all the students agreed that this could be achieved by putting in a formal request but in reality students changed personal tutor unofficially and *“adopt support from someone they can relate to”*. The students also commented that the *“good, approachable staff get overloaded and the word gets around who to approach and avoid”*.

The female year 2 student commented that *“the student body feel there are staff who actively avoid dealing with students and put up a front to avoid pastoral responsibilities”*. When asked what can be done about this, they all felt that staff should be selected on their skills to be personal tutors rather than staff having to take on a role they cannot or do not want to do.

Question 3: What about other support?

One student stated they were aware of students having to go externally for mental health support due to what they felt was an unacceptable wait to see someone (time not specified). The suggested long waiting list for mental health support has also been shared amongst students in social media.

This raises the question if students are perhaps being unrealistic with the expectation of an instant response from support services or an immediate answer for their problem. This will be discussed later in Chapter 6, reflecting on other research in this area of student expectation at university.

One comment *“we are vulnerable individuals”* was interesting and raises the issue of resilience and the fact of the students being away from home for the first time, feeling particularly vulnerable away from their home /friend support network. Student resilience (as detailed in section 2.5.4) will be considered later in the discussion, as it is an important factor in student retention and success.

The focus group collectively agreed that there was a high demand for the support services and that they were *“swamped”*. With the increased awareness of mental health issues, they felt the university should provide more resources in this area.

The students also mentioned national media information in 2014 where a Keele student committed suicide following allegations of rape. This raised awareness for students at Keele that there was support available and also some information about access and usage.

The two male students commented *“that males in particular find admitting they have problems and seeking support difficult and there is a stigma attached with it - it is seen as a weakness”*

Question 4: Are you aware of students leaving due to problems/lack of support?

A year 1 female student stated that there was now more dependency on the university for support and if students are not aware of it or cannot access it quickly enough then they might leave. This is made worse if the students cannot get support at home or they live a long way from their family support network. Whilst a student commented they were aware of student leaving sometimes it was not due to personal /academic problems but maybe change of course or wanting to be nearer home/work etc. The focus group commented that there is a good policy at their university of being able to postpone studies or restudy if necessary rather than just leaving HE.

One student commented that there was very positive peer support in her cohort and they had a *“Survive to the End”* attitude where they all supported each other at difficult times.

It was evident from the focus group discussion that each department at Keele works on different systems with no consistency of personal tutor support/pastoral care. The students identified that

the medical school required more specialist support services due to the nature of the courses but they were aware that some medical students were still struggling to get support

Question 5: Do you think there is a link between personal and academic problems at university?

All student collectively agreed that problems in one's personal life can have a huge impact on academic performance and progression and that stress during exam periods or meeting assignment deadlines can affect students personally and initiate mental health problems such as anxiety.

Question 6: How can things be improved?

The focus group students felt there needs to be a raised profile of it being acceptable amongst students to get help and remove the fear of getting support and the stigma. One student commented that the *"support seems distant"* and that a student with anxiety would find it difficult to approach the services for an appointment.

A comment was made that the Keele formal complaints system needs to be clear but this statement seems unclear whether it is about academic or support staff complaints. Students also wanted their rights and expectations to be made clearer but seemed unaware of the Keele Student Charter⁵².

Students described the university support system as *"fragmented and compartmentalised"* with different organised support structures in departments and different groups with no coherent connectivity.

The students recognise that Keele has made efforts to move forward in acknowledging exam stress and providing additional support and activity sessions like meditation and animal therapy⁵³.

Better student support with mediation for disputes (particularly in halls of residence) and having formal student advocacy is an area which they felt would help.

⁵² Student Charter. <https://www.keele.ac.uk/student-agreement/>

⁵³ <https://www.keele.ac.uk/examplus/staycalm/>

Whilst the focus group students were aware of an emergency service for students in crisis whilst on campus they felt the Keele Nightline chat line could be better advertised for students feeling alone or wanting to discuss problems.

A comment was made by the female year 2 student who said *“the idea of university being a community with everyone having a responsibility”* was interesting but it was unclear how this would actually be achieved without some formal system of monitoring.

However, the suggestion of a buddy or mentor system was not considered important as the student felt many would want to be independent and not acknowledge any weakness. It was acknowledged that students in higher years will have some empathy for student struggling in various course topics and assignments and could perhaps give some informal peer support and encouragement if required.

5.3.2.1 Analysis

By reviewing the comments through descriptive analysis, the themes identified through the questions are centred mainly on the issues at Keele of the personal tutoring system and the waiting time to see specialist support such as mental health.

As with Harper Adams University focus group, all the Keele students contributed well to the focus group and the general environment and body language of the students indicated they felt relaxed and open to talking confidently with other students they did not know. The discussion at times was lively with some strong comments about teaching staff and their responsibility for supporting students. Again, it was sometimes unclear whether the students were referring to pastoral care and their personal tutors or the criticism was about academic teaching staff and the lack of support for assignments and conflicts over marking, grades and feedback on work. Analysis of the comments about the personal tutoring system indicate that when a student is assigned a good empathic member of staff that they can relate to, the outcomes for support were very positive. However the

sometimes very negative comments about being dismissed by staff or staff not being approachable for some students does seem to be an issue that needs addressing, as well as the dissimilar systems of allocated support in the different schools and departments.

Whilst all the focus group students seemed aware of the wide range of support provision at Keele, there was criticism that it is still not enough and that waiting lists are long.

The students gave some useful insights into improving the support service at Keele but the issue of unrealistic expectations amongst some students along with the inability as HE students to meet and overcome new challenges (resilience) is a challenge for effective pastoral care. This challenge, combined with the impact this has on personal wellbeing, will be considered on in the final discussion chapter of this thesis.

5.3.3 Analysis between Keele University and Harper Adams University focus groups

Statistical analysis of the quantitative online survey (section 5.2.2) showed only two statistically significant results when the Chi Square Test was applied.

Firstly, that there was a significant difference between the responses of Keele and HAU students with regards to a greater use of the pastoral support services at Keele than at HAU. Following the analysis of the focus groups there does not seem much uptake of services from the students at Keele but the focus group students might not reflect the whole population who answered the online survey. Whilst the Keele focus group students criticised the provision and long waiting lists, it does appear the service is very well used.

Question 8 on the online survey asked about perceived value of the support received. Statistical analysis showed there is a significant difference between the responses of Keele and HAU students with regards to the perception of value of the support services with Keele students who have used the service being more dissatisfied with the service than HAU students.

The discussion in the focus groups supported the online survey results about use and perception of the support services at each university and whilst Keele students use the services more, they are more dissatisfied with the service. There may be many reasons why this has occurred from the data.

Keele advertises its range of services widely and has a central hub, the Tawney Building, through which students can easily access appointments and get advice. The larger student population and wider range of students at Keele with potentially a higher proportion from lower socio-economic and varied backgrounds may create higher demand on university services. In addition, higher numbers of international students who may experience cultural difficulties and local commuter students may in addition create further demand on the services compared to Harper Adams University which has more limited resources and access. There could be bias in the online survey with students at Keele answering the survey who are dissatisfied with the service and want to have a voice.

Students may also be unclear as to what pastoral support is and dissatisfaction with services may cross-over into academic support and relationships with academic staff. The lack of clarity in understanding pastoral support may be a result of the fact that neither HEI in this study, has any documented policy on student support. Whilst pastoral support may be defined and understood by the HEI, this is not clearly articulated to the student population so that they are aware of what is available and what they can expect in terms of a service.

Students at Keele may be dissatisfied with the service due to unrealistic expectations, have been matched to the wrong support or perhaps need more time for counselling to support them.

5.4 Qualitative analysis: The Interviews

The final methods of data collection to support answering the research question was the use of interviews. In Kvale's (1996) *Introduction to Interviewing* text, he suggests the research interview seeks to cover information at both a factual and a meaning level, with the latter being more

challenging to interpret. Understanding the meaning of the interviewees experience is widely used in psychological research and is very dependent on the skills of the interviewer and the interview techniques used.

Given that a number of interviews were undertaken with staff and students, it was imperative that there was consistency in gaining the information required. A series of structured open-ended questions were therefore used which were approved by the ethics panel at Keele (Appendices 8 and 10). As all the interviews were standardized, it allows more effective analysis. However, the flexibility of open-ended question allowed an additional avenue of questioning to take place, depending on respondents experience and personal views. This additional information gave a rich source of information and further supported the baseline information collected.

Interviews took place with staff and students at each institution in this research and to make evaluation and analysis valid, comparison were made both within and between each institution for both the staff and student interviews.

Analysis of the interviews was made collectively to create broad themes for each set of staff and student narratives achieved through the interviews.

Like the focus group, a simple descriptive analysis method was used to analyse the information given but in addition the technique of using portraits to interpret the narrative was also included. Smith (as cited in Maxwell 2012) highlighted two distinct forms of analysis. One technique that sheds light on interconnected parts of narratives and the other technique seeks out similarities between cases. Within this research, a two-part approach to analysis exploits the complementary benefits of each method. Seidman (2013) identifies the use of 'Portrait' as a narrative style summary through the words of the participant which emphasises connections between different aspects of the narrative. This allows their personal account or story to be made explicit. From the analysis of the interviews the portraits were created for each interviewee to aid understanding and address issues around pastoral care both from the students and the support staff perspectives.

The creation of the portraits for each individual interviewee involved careful listening to the recorded accounts and close and repeated reading of the transcript with notes taken of the text. Webster and Mertova (2007) identify that portraits can provide instant knowledge where there is evidence of a clear message relating to the research questions and that this method of narrative inquiry is particularly well-suited to investigations of complex, human-centred, and culture-specific environments, such as quality in higher education. All quotes taken directly from the recording transcripts with the consent of the participants, are given in italics.

5.4.1 Student Interviews

Two students each from HAU and Keele were interviewed about their views on pastoral care within their own HEI. One student from each gender was selected at random from those that volunteered from the online survey. For the purposes of anonymity, these students will be referred to and identified as male/HAU or Keele and female HAU or Keele. Questions raised included asking the student about themselves to get an insight into their experience and to allow them to relax in the interview process. Further questions explored their own issues or those of other people they knew. For the students, key questions about who they would approach for help and how they would find support were essential as well as suggested improvements in the services provided by their HEI.

5.4.1.1 Harper Adams University

HAU Male Student 1 Portrait

This first year student aged 19 from a semi-urban background, identified himself as needing many levels of support both Learning Support for his Dyslexia but also more complex problems caused by his ADHD and Autism. Whilst he stated the latter conditions were managed personally and the student did not seek any specialist support, he identified that it caused him considerable problems with group work at university and that he gets irritated and suffers anxiety as a result.

When asked about support at HAU, the student was already aware of academic support and knew about counselling etc. through the poster promotions and talks during the fresher's induction. He explained that he was involved with some peer support and was actively supporting some fellow student with personal issues.

He mentioned the wardens in the halls being very useful for support but felt there were more needed as they seemed overwhelmed with dealing with supporting new students in term 1. The students felt the wardens were very approachable and being near the age of the new students could relate to their problems and perhaps also had some previous experience and could advise.

When asked about possible improvements to the pastoral care at the university, the student mentioned the use of group discussion but then expressed concerns about confidentiality. He felt issues caused by bullying, unacceptable behaviour could be dealt with by better anonymous reporting procedures. When questioned about support from Student Services, he stated that they can be difficult to approach and when asked to elucidate, he felt they did not take students concerns seriously.

"Dealing with student services can be slightly standoffish, particularly if it's discussing an issue due to the university"

With regards to students approaching staff for support, he felt there was very much a culture of 'male macho' at HAU and male students did not want to admit any weaknesses.

"Fear of ridicule is quite powerful at times"

When asked about his perception of being a student at HAU he responded (written with reference to HAU being a rural campus with many students from rural backgrounds)

"Yes, due to the rural sector of being, erm, independent, er, hardy, and er, slightly xenophobic in some cases. People don't want to open up. Also, the case of softness is not really found in rural individuals. But with townies it's more open, and so that's when the class divide occurs".

When asked about support from others than allocated staff and Student Services, the student was asked about support from allocated peer support or some sort of 'buddy system' and whether it would be useful. He stated that students identified their own buddy support and had had some experience of a buddy system whilst at school in Scotland. He described talking to fellow students as:

"Not so official, not so standoffish and not so scary"

The student was asked about improvements in the support system that he thought might be useful, he suggested a medical professional talk at the start of the new academic year.

"They need a net to catch them whenever they fall. 'Cos they can fall quite far, especially with the availability of drugs and alcohol on site".

In summary, the student presented himself as a very articulate, intelligent young man with many clear insights into student problems and the support needed. He was clear about undertaking the process of support and expressed confidence in seeing his first 'port of call' for support and advice, his Senior Tutor whom he described as *"very approachable"*.

His portrait presented was that of a very empathic young man with some complex personal and social problems who seemed very reflective of both his own needs and those of others he had offered support to. He fully acknowledged the availability of pastoral support at the university but was keen to point out the cultural problems of both rural and male students on campus who needed support.

HAU Female Student 2 Portrait

This student was a 22 year old student in her final year (4) at Harper Adams University. It is important to note from this interview that this student admitted she had little experience of pastoral support. In terms of support at Harper Adams University, she had mainly used academic guidance but did admit using the careers service for advice.

She identified using her course Senior Tutor for support during a periods of illness

“When I was in second year I was, at the end of first term I was quite ill, and then obviously it was really helpful to have my tutor there to go and speak to her about any issues, and they just extended my assignment deadlines”.

The student was fully aware of the services available to support her at university and mentioned financial support, the Students Union and counselling support. She identified that additional services that would be useful and discussed the need for more information and support for students on both tax and housing, particularly when working on placement.

When asked about the possible need for a peer support or buddy system she stated she did not think it would work as you need to recruit the right people (but did not elaborate on what “*right people*” meant to her).

“I think the majority of second years would not be too keen on that. I think once you get into second year, they’re known as being a little bit more arrogant, and I think they’re a little less likely to want to help”.

When questioned about the importance of having support provision at Harper Adams University and whether students were realistic about what they could access:

“I think its two halves. I think sometimes they say that they need more, and then other times, I think that they are babied quite a lot. I mean, Harper really is a bit more of a boarding school than a university compared to where some of my friends have gone to city universities”.

The students identified she had not experienced any difficult personal situations at university but acknowledged she had a very supportive family network to approach if she needed any support.

5.4.1.2 Keele University

Keele Male Student 1 Portrait

This student presented himself as a very articulate and enthusiastic individual who was in his second year of studies at Keele University.

He identified that he was extremely proactive in the student body working as a student representative for three courses, a member of the diversity working group and a member of several external groups to the university. In addition, the student was identified at Keele as a StAR⁵⁴ elected student.

He declared, he was a huge advocate of diversity of all types in the student population which shows a very positive attitude and a useful insight and knowledge about any issues he had come across in his student committee roles. He believed that Keele was one of the most diverse universities in the UK and mentioned LGBT, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), Asian, and the many cultural and religious groups at Keele University. He stated that the student population *“is very open to others.”*

Pastoral support was identified as being very positive at Keele with Personal Tutors being the first point of contact for students. Course representatives, Students Services, Nightline were all mentioned and the student stated there was a big emphasis to include disabled students on campus with better access and targeted support. The Student Union was also identified as hosting events and providing additional support for students.

⁵⁴ StARs are elected on an annual basis in October, supported and comprehensively trained by the [Keele SU Activities](#) team. Every year of study, including postgraduates, elect a dedicated StAR to represent them by course of study. Some of the duties of StARs include raising issues relevant to students to academic staff, to inform students of changes to academic processes and to seek feedback on these changes

The range of dedicated buildings on campus for support and the *“connected feeling of the services”* were positive statements identifying his belief that the pastoral support system work well as Keele and was reinforced by a comment that *“there are very good communication systems in place”*.

His own personal experience of engaging with his personal tutor was very positive and he found his allocated tutor both approachable and flexible in terms of gaining access for support. The student acknowledged he was aware of other students that experience problems that resulted in them changing their Personal Tutor or intervention from Senior Tutors in the department that manage the Personal Tutoring system. In his experience working on students committee, the student was positive about the complaints system which he felt worked well and the university had a good process for feedback to improve the system where problems were identified.

When asked about a peer support system he stated there was a Keele mentor system and this was managed with training within each faculty and he was unaware if any other faculties provided student mentors.

The student interviewed felt *“it was a basic right of students to get support”* and he felt students were realistic about what support they could get, and how quickly. The stress of workloads and personal circumstances were identified as having a huge impact on some students but policy mechanisms like the mitigating circumstances procedures were available for students to extend submission deadlines or consider postponement of studies.

Whilst the student stated early in the interview that *“there are very good communication systems in place”*, this was contradicted later with the comments that *“Sometimes students are pushed from pillar to post and we need to ensure better communication”*. This anomaly will be evaluated and discussed further in the analysis of the student interviews. It was also interesting to note that the student identified that some course areas like Psychology were dominated by women and this made some male students feel isolated.

With regards to complaints, the system at Keele was described as “robust” and all grievances were dealt with appropriately with clear disciplinary procedures being in place and applied.

The student stated that attendance is assumed and there is no formal monitoring of student engagement with teaching. He felt that formal monitoring was not required as “*University is about learning about yourself*”.

He finished his interview by stating that Keele had invested heavily in supporting students, particularly encouraging disabled and overseas students to come to the university and wanted in his interview to stress that Keele was a “*Community University*”.

Keele Female Student 2 Portrait

The female student for the Keele Interview was a second year student aged 20 but was in year 1 having restarted on a new degree. The student was made aware of the range of support services available and received reminders via the Keele Learning Environment (KLE) and emails.

The students disclosed she had a long standing physical disability and required support both from the Disabilities Service and Students Support at Keele during her studies. She expressed some problem in changing course and acknowledged the support of The Keele University Skills Portfolio (KUSP)⁵⁵ in helping her to change course.

When asked about problems she had faced, she stated that she had had issues over accessibility and wheelchair access. Her health problems had also led to poor attendance. She had found some teaching rooms and building difficult to access and had no assistance getting to classes where she experienced the problem of being crushed during busy times on campus. Her medication she was taking left her very tired and was allowed to use a Dictaphone to record classes. In year 1 at Keele

55

[https://www.keele.ac.uk/media/keeleuniversity/student-support/curriculum-support-and-development/The%20Keele%20University%20Skills%20Portfolio%20Student%20Guide%202017%20FINAL%20FINAL%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.keele.ac.uk/media/keeleuniversity/student-support/curriculum-support-and-development/The%20Keele%20University%20Skills%20Portfolio%20Student%20Guide%202017%20FINAL%20FINAL%20(1).pdf)

she received additional financial support as she needed ensuite accommodation in the halls of residence.

She had been referred to counselling as she says, *“I get traumatised and I am not good at dealing with stress”*. She did not find this a positive or helpful experience and did not attend again and found access to other support *“difficult”*. When asked about positive support she said she felt the StAR programme was good and she had had support from fellow students.

She felt that students need to be realistic about support but that the university needs to recognise the cultural shock of coming to university and the problems faced with being independent, especially if a student has a disability/disabilities.

The student felt that having a disability was a *“pride thing – there are polar views either I can manage on my own or not. It is also about mental stability and confidence”*.

One issue the student identified was her assessment for disabilities and getting a mobility car and special parking etc. She identified that she was aware Keele was making changes and was fast tracking requests rather than waiting for the formal paperwork. She considered that for students like herself, that have to miss lectures due to health or hospital appointment that full lectures notes should be made available as she found it hard to catch up.

Whilst during the interview the student expressed some negativity towards a lack of some support for her own situation, she finished the interview with acknowledging

“I love the Keele Support System – it makes students feel confident”

5.4.1.3 Analysis of the student interviews

The four student interviews present very different experiences and perceptions of the pastoral support system of their universities.

On some points of access and efficacy, the female HAU student and the male Keele student were extremely positive regarding the provision of support, access and effectiveness. However, this was only their personal experience and it appears for these two students, one identified as not using the support system and the other was actively engaged in the student support system and promoting resources and therefore may have been somewhat biased in his unreservedly positive support of the provision. It was interesting to note that the tone of his voice during the interview was very affirmative and combined with fairly animated body language, he seemed keen to promote the Keele support process and in particular, peer student support that he and others provided through peer mentoring, StAR etc.

The other two students interviewed present some really interesting portraits. Both identified disabilities and the challenges they have faced both with practical problems and with engaging with the support process at their individual institutions. Both had a slight criticism of some parts of support but were on the whole satisfied with the resources provided but acknowledged some students do have to wait to get specialist support.

What was interesting to note was the male Keele student who contradicted himself saying early in his interview that *“there are very good communication systems in place”* but refuted this later with the comment that *“Sometimes students are pushed from pillar to post and we need to ensure better communication”*. The latter quote may reflect an individual’s poor initial experience with seeking support and not being directed to the correct service. It is unclear who is responsible for this, but at Keele the first contact is usually with Personal Tutors so this may imply that some Personal Tutors are not fully conversant with the support they can signpost a student to. The comment saying the *“good communication systems being in place”* may refer to the communication between the various types of support providers at the university. This will be evaluated and discussed further through the staff interviews.

In making a comparison of student's perception of support both within and between each university, no clear overall analysis can be made from the comments but individual comments on accessibility and particularly the remarks about male students not wanting to get support as it is seen as a sign of weakness ("*not macho*") was also raised as a problem in the focus groups. In 2009, Manchester University⁵⁶ faced criticism for creating the first official MENS society: Masculinity Exploring Networking and Support. The group was set up to support male students in an arena where they may feel less vulnerable discussing issues in an all-male environment. This will be further evaluated following the comments by the support staff and in the overall discussion of the research findings and reflecting on the research of others in this area.

5.4.2 Staff Interviews

Interviews took place with four members of staff in each HEI in the research. Staff were approached for participation in the planned interviews from several areas of the support provision at each university including counselling support, mental health support and from a Personal Tutors and a Senior Tutors. These staff were included in the research to maintain the focus on those supporting students with personal problems. Whilst the pastoral support network is in reality, much wider and includes others such as careers support, specialist support provided for international students and guidance/mentoring through religious support etc, these sections of support were not included in this research.

All staff participating in the research interviews were provided with details of the project (Appendix 10) and were given consent forms for participation in the research as well as use of any quotes for analysis following transcription (Appendix 12). As with the focus groups and student interviews, all the outline questions used were piloted with other volunteers to ensure understanding and were also approved by the Ethics Committee at Keele University for this research. For the purposes of

⁵⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2009/nov/23/men-students-support-groups-universities>

anonymity, staff participating in the research are identified only by their institution and role in supporting students. Like the student interviews, staff were asked about themselves and to explain their role in student support at their HEI. More detailed questions about access, training for staff and the issues presented by the students were explored (Appendix 11).

As the staff who were interviewed have different roles in the pastoral care in their HEI, the format of the open-ended questions varied slightly and were therefore pertinent to those being interviewed.

5.4.2.1 Harper Adams University Staff Portraits

1. HAU Mental Health Counsellor

I. Tell me about your role at Harper Adams University?

The staff member has worked at HAU as a health adviser for 4 years and is a fully qualified mental health nurse. He initially meets students at Freshers Week and also emails all new students to make them aware of the mental health support service. His work allocation as an adviser is 18 hrs per week with initial student appointments taking an hour with repeat support session of 30 mins. Full assessments can take over 1.5 hrs with each student so he felt he was under a lot of pressure with so many students to see. He kept full records of all meetings and reported that a third of students coming to HAU and engaging with his support were already aware they had mental health problems. Some students used HAU as an alternative to support from home and some combined support with counselling during term time at HAU and other support whilst at home. The staff member stressed that he would not intervene with external support but would help a student with any support coping strategies. Students can self-refer themselves to support, but mainly come to see the support via Students Services, Senior Tutor or other staff recommendations. All students are seen in a private room away from other students in the main Student Services area. If students are assessed and do not require specialist mental support (e.g. mild

depression) then they are referred to the general counselling support. The mental health counsellor sees only the more complex cases or refers these onto further assessment through the local GP.

II. What sort of problems do you see and support?

Students mainly present with stress, anxiety and depression which can have a major impact on the students' wellbeing. He elaborated by saying

"Well mainly things like difficulty in concentration, memory, difficulties in organisation of themselves, withdrawing away from others, that's a common sort of symptom that they exhibit. So, it's all those sort of more difficult symptoms of depression that people get and to some degree some of them are using substances as a way to treat themselves. Academically they are capable, but from an emotionally point of view, their self-esteem is pretty poor. And a lot of that it may be to do with their upbringing and their experiences."

He also sees students who have low self-esteem and he has seen an increase in students self-harming and with eating disorders.

There is also an increase in students coming to university with spectrum disorders such as Asperger's and Autism and the staff interviewed felt that some fail in HE due to the lack of support from home where they may have been very protected and sometimes lack the social skills needed when transitioning to university life.

"It's the social needs which we need to assess better. Do you know what I mean?"

III. How realistic do you think students are about the support and allowances that we can make for students at university?

The staff stated that they felt the stigma of mental health problems is now less apparent but that some international students find it still difficult to engage.

“I mean particularly Chinese students because there’s no such thing as depression”
(recognised in their culture).

The staff stated that students have

“Unrealistic expectations and expect an instant service. You have to compromise. You can’t necessarily give, the amount of support that you need to”.

There was also the student expectation that appointments were 24 hr availability and that there were no waiting lists. With regards to referral to the NHS mental Health support services, the staff stressed

“I’ve had some people waiting up to three months. Some people waiting up to six to eight weeks. The other problem is that they get a phone assessment, most of them. That tends to cause difficulties for those individuals because they find that difficult to do.”

The staff considered that HAU had a clear Fitness to Study Policy and that students who are really ill should not be in university. As there is only one mental health counsellor at HAU, they stated they were very stretched in term time with some work required for residential students on campus during the holidays.

Problems can arise trying to support students whilst away on placement and the staff stated a student travelled four hours to get support just once. He had tried Skype in order to support placement students working without easy access to mental health support locally but found the students were uncomfortable with this and preferred to use telephone conversations for support. Whilst this was useful, the lack of access to body language and expression can make assessment difficult.

2. HAU Student Counsellor

I. Tell me about yourself and your role?

The staff member interviewed was the University Counsellor who worked 33 hrs per week in term time. She dealt with a wide range of issues which included: anxiety (failure and social), depression, alcohol problems, drug misuse, self-harming, eating-disorders, sleeplessness, relationship issues and bereavement. She deals with students in all years and also supports PhD students needing counselling.

The most common issue she dealt with amongst the student body was anxiety and the feelings of insecurity which she felt were often related to coming away from home.

Students are referred to support by Students Services, Senior Tutors and staff but the Counsellor considered that self-referral is the best option where students actively seek support and are more in control of their own care.

She does provide an out of hours service with mobile contact if advice is needed.

II. How do you support the students?

The staff explained they have a range of support mechanisms depending on the problem presented.

Some support is focussed around transition and the student talking openly about their concerns. The staff member also runs Mindfulness⁵⁷ sessions as well as developing coping strategies with the students for dealing with completion, pressure of study, issues around their personal image and problems of not feeling good enough (e.g. in the classroom or socially in student sports teams). This raises the well-publicised phenomenon of Imposter Syndrome⁵⁸ mentioned earlier and will be discussed later is the overall analysis of the staff portraits. The Counsellor also uses other forms of support such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) in addition to other techniques. Students with

⁵⁷ <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/mindfulness/#.XZYUIUZKguU>

⁵⁸ <https://www.verywellmind.com/imposter-syndrome-and-social-anxiety-disorder-4156469>

more complex problems such as eating disorders are referred to a specialist Clinic in Shrewsbury and there is follow up to ensure students do attend. Students presenting with self-harming issues are triaged with the mental health advice at the university. The university also refers students to the Crisis teams in Telford (Samaritans) and staff in Student Services staff operate a rota to be on call for students in crisis situations.

*“The students I work with are very much in competition with each other, so-
there's a huge amount of competitiveness.”*

“They want to be perfect. There's such a high expectation.”

The type of support is focussed on the person-centred approach. Students are seen by the counsellor once a week for six weeks, although some students are seen for more extended periods as required.

The Counselling service is well advertised with students sometimes encouraging friends to seek support. There is currently a two week waiting list within the university for counselling support but the staff member will prioritise urgent cases and can stagger access if the demand is high.

There has been the suggestion of group therapy and the therapist felt this would be a good idea but confidentiality amongst the students may be an issue.

III. Is there anything that could be improved?

The Counsellor felt that in order to enhance the service for students more specialist staff were needed at the university. She uses a trainee placement counsellor who sees 2 to 3 students a week as part of their training but this only has a small impact on reducing her workload.

She felt that students were sometimes unrealistic about the support and help they could get but she acknowledged that for those students with problems, it had a high impact on their studies at university, particularly with regards to low self –esteem.

The Counsellor commented that the increase in students with additional needs such as Autism is making the support provision for students more challenging with the students often being more

vulnerable. She felt that the university needed more targeted specialist support for students with additional needs.

With regards to other issues for the students which causes additional problems: financial pressure, balancing working whilst studying, family commitments and carer responsibilities were all identified as concerns that cannot be easily remedied by just having counselling.

3. HAU Student Services

I. What is your role as a staff member at Harper Adams University?

The staff interviewed was the Student Services Manager who at the time of this research had been in post for five years and had worked in Student Services for ten years. Her job responsibilities have encompassed several roles and is she is also line manager to several staff. She is assisted in her role by an Assistant Student Services Manager, a Participation Officer, Accommodation staff, Administrative staff, and International Officer, Counsellors in mental and general support, bar staff and eighteen student wardens who look after students in the halls of residents on site.

II. How do students access support?

The first point of contact for students in residential accommodation is usually the student wardens (final year students elected to take the responsibility and living on site). They mentor and support new students and deal with lower level issues like home sickness etc.

Otherwise students come directly to Student Services for support or book an appointment to see the two counsellors. Student Services also work closely with Senior Tutors to identify students at risk and individuals 'falling through the net'

Out of hours, students in need access support from the Duty Wardens who can deal with minor problems, minor injuries, drink related issues etc. Members of Student Services staff are available on call on site for more difficult situations such as assault, mental health crises but the staff interviewed commented:

"That the support system is becoming very stretched, I would say."

The staff also commented that although there is site security at the university, their role has been the protection of buildings and not for students' personal security, but this is being reviewed.

The Student Services Manager remarked that students often come to see her directly rather than via her team where perhaps they have to explain their situation several times before finally seeing the manager. There was her comment that there is a gap between the wardens on the front line and her role as Manager is interesting and suggests that there needs to be more interim support in Students Services.

"Because there does seem to be a gap between- We've got wardens dealing with those first-line issues, we've got security dealing with campus security".

III. Is there anything that could be improved apart from short staffing? What problems do you face in your department?

An increasing problem is parental involvement. Limited information can be shared with parents as the students are adults. With higher fees, parents consider they have a vested interest and Student Services considers that the continual interference is stopping students becoming independent.

"They don't seem to let them have the conversations themselves, which is what I would always try and encourage."

If parents are contacted with the consent of the student, the student is present during the conversation to ensure the message is clear.

Another problem mentioned during the interview was the increase in students with significant mental health difficulties. More full-time counsellors, especially mental health advisors are needed with increased access time for students with perhaps some evening and weekend contact.

“I think that there is now better acknowledgement of mental health conditions and it’s more openly talked about: there’s less stigma, you see it all over social media, it’s okay to talk about mental health issues.”

The staff interviewed also suggested that there was an increase in demand for support due to the changing student profile. Different schooling, different family backgrounds, urban backgrounds had caused a greater mix of student intake and the addition of difficulties in transition to HE from home brings their problems to the surface.

It was also mentioned the problems of language and culture for the Chinese students who spend their final year HAU completing their degree. One student is known to Skype counselling support from China.

For some students it is identified that they are not well enough to continue studying at the present time and the fitness to study policy is used.

“I spoke to a Course Manager recently about a student who, we both know that they’re struggling – the mental health counsellor has seen them and he knows that they’re struggling, but it’s taken three of us to almost get that student to make the right decision, which in this case was postponement.”

The Student Services manager remarked that the university needs a holistic approach to support with all agencies at the university being actively involved. It was suggested that being a small institution, it is easier to identify students with problems and act appropriately but as the student numbers increase and the intake becomes more diverse, effective support is becoming more challenging. For students living off site, most problems are around domestic issues and they are supported through Student Services who can also act as mediators in disputes between students or between students and landlords.

Concerns were expressed about support for students away on placement with many students hiding problems from their visiting tutors. Some placement students had resorted to emailing their issue for support at university and found this liberating to share their problems.

“And, in some ways, I think they must find that cathartic, ‘cos even though they’re not having a face-to-face conversation, they’re getting everything off their chest, putting it in an email, sending it to someone that they know is there to listen, and then getting a response. We have picked up on, though, the fact that a lot of them seem to pretend that everything’s okay when they see their visiting tutor.”

The staff interviewed felt there was conflict of interests in her role. For example, whilst she had responsibility in managing the bar staff at the university and yet was trying to promote a healthy lifestyle for the students.

It was identified that more support was needed to help students with coping mechanisms, but the use of mobile apps had been used well by students in self-evaluation and in monitoring and support. Whilst the support services were well advertised at the university, the problem identified was that this puts more pressure on an under-resourced system at the university.

For students facing financial hardship, there are funds available through Access to Learning which again is managed by the Student Services Manager.

The Manager appreciates that the criticism of ‘mollycoddling’ at HAU compared to other universities may be true, but that the Duty of Care legislation and the care service provision is essential to student welfare

“I’ve got more positions within the team than we had five or six years ago, but what I need is more hours, or more people doing the same types of jobs, or a better first line of defence.”

4. HAU Staff Personal Tutor

I. What is your role as a staff member at Harper Adams University?

The staff member interviewed had been a lecturer at HAU for 9 years and held the role of Senior Tutor for 7.5 years (at the time of the interview). She had previously worked in industry and had a previous interest in coaching and mentoring staff.

II. How does pastoral support work at HAU?

Responsibility for pastoral support of students at HAU varied with different courses with some Senior Tutors taking on particular years and the Course Managers other years.

The staff member did not take responsibility for particular groups or cohorts of students but shared the role with the Course Manager. At the time of the interview, neither the Senior Tutor nor Course Manager taught Year 2 students and the interviewee felt they had been unable to engage with these groups and were dealing mainly with problems and not being as proactive as they would have liked.

The Senior Tutor felt the major issues tend to arise in the first year of study (where support was targeted) and that as she and the Course Manager were teaching these students, they can talk about study and support in the same environment without needing separate meetings. With regards to academic and personal support she stated

“They're not different things, they're all part of the same student journey”.

The staff would like to teach all years but this required a change in staffing on modules which would not be possible until some staff retired and released the teaching.

The repeated timetabled weekly Senior Tutor meetings seems to be large with 25 students in the groups which makes them unmanageable and difficult for students to take in information and discuss issues.

When students have problems to discuss she commented

“They kind of see us more in the class so they get more used to that and then really as second years we've kind of released them, but then we get them back as fourth years because they've got more stresses, I think, in the fourth year”.

Additional support is provided through the placement year and also at the request of the students for personal of one to one meetings.

Also identified was the problem of staff suitability to the role of Senior Tutor and that there seems a scarcity of suitable and interested staff willing to take on the roles at HAU which are perceived to be both very challenging and time consuming, with loss of time for career development, knowledge exchange work and personal research.

“You need people that are interested in the students and some of our staff don't have what we would consider the right approach”

III. What training have you had and what issues do you deal with?

The staff stated they had had no training other than a mental health workshop and a session on Unconscious Bias⁵⁹ which is offered to all staff across the university.

Issues which she dealt with ranged from; illness, problems with friends and family but less with mental health and stress. The staff member felt her role was to remove pressure for the student and give support which may be through allowing mitigating circumstances to extend assignment deadlines etc.

“We only tend to see them one to one either if we've called them in because of poor attendance or they make an appointment to see us”.

There is close liaison between Senior Tutors and Student Services with students who need referrals to specialist supporting the HEI. There is use of the fitness to study policy for students who continue to fail to attend and have personal issues for not engaging with their education.

⁵⁹ <https://diversity.ucsf.edu/resources/unconscious-bias>

“If that student won't engage with any - I've written letters to her, she doesn't collect them You know, at that point I'm not actually actively taking her out of the institution, I think she's taking herself out. But I think that was the right answer. Although it feels bad taking a student out of education, that student wasn't really in education and they were affecting the study of students around them because the group work elements and that”.

The staff stated they consider the university to be very supportive of its students and that the students value the support and attention they receive. This is evidenced by the good feedback and students support focussed awards the university is getting.

As a small HEI with students taught in small tutorials groups works well, because staff get to know the students and develop relationships of trust. As both a Senior Tutor and teaching member of staff there is a useful link to support students in both pastoral care and academic problems.

One impact that has been noticed with regards to pastoral care is that of the influence of social media.

“I think social media is a really bad thing because I think they all judge everybody else's perfect lives. So, there's kind of more to worry about but actually, there isn't really. That's probably how I'd sum it up”.

When asked if the staff perceived there was any link between pastoral and academic problems, they commented on that if a student had personal problems they would be unable to focus fully on academic study *“so the two do go hand in hand”*

IV. Is there anything that could be improved?

The staff perceived that there were sufficient services for the size of institution but acknowledged her students were more resilient due to the nature of their course compared to courses like the vet nurses who had high levels of responsibility in their care role.

When asked about progress to further develop services from what was historically a small very specialised Agricultural College to a wider more multifaceted land based university

"I think we're taking little, tiny steps but I think we've come from a very niche way of being"

Asked whether the staff follow-up on a students guided to support

"I wish it was possible to know whether when you send them to academic guidance, they go. I sometimes ask but I don't like to - I don't feel I should because if I follow up then I'm stepping in too far, I think".

One area for improvement that was identified was the role of the Students Union (SU) at Harper Adams University. The staff commented that she considered the SU saw itself as a separate entity at the HEI and was "not really integrated into the university way of being". The disparity seems to come from the historic background of the SU at HAU and its role centred on the social life provision for the university. With reference to the SU the staff commented.

"Because of what they think student experience is, which I think is back to this thing about it being they've got a social life and they've got an academic life and the two are not united by anybody because student union don't unite it, so they think that's okay".

"I think student services is the closest we've got to what the student union should be doing but we're doing it because the student union aren't doing it".

"We just need a student union with a different ethic and, erm, expectation and for it to be more professional and more covering the holistic student experience".

The staff referred to the 'Harpery' culture at the university referring to some of the rural students who come from young farmers club backgrounds and have similar interests and friendships groups. The students seem to form strong friendships and the peer support often replaces or supplements some of the pastoral care needs.

5.4.2.2 Analysis of the Harper Adams Staff interviews

The portraits of the four staff interviewed provided some useful and authoritative comments to analyse and evaluate.

It is evident from the interviews with the three support staff, that the system of supporting students, particularly those with more complex and time-consuming problems is coming under considerable pressure. Many of the comments made by the staff in the interviews are closely related reinforcing the common issues students are facing primarily with mental health, personal identity, social isolation and transitioning to university life. It is evident that there is a clear system of referring students on to specialist help and the support mechanisms provided by front line staff in both Student Service and the Senior Tutors role is both effective and personal, with staff knowing the students well in a small institution.

The academic staff interviewed, identified that there are issues with fewer course team staff supporting students in a pastoral role and that many staff were not suitable to be appointed. Academic staff with a mentoring role do not appear to receive much training apart from occasional mental health workshops and learn the role through experience and their own mentoring from more senior experienced staff. The role of the SU is also an important consideration in providing another avenue of support for students. At the time of this research the SU at HAU was not actively involved with the academic running of the HEI. In 2020, a revised policy of the SU was implemented to become closely linked and provide a more student voice to inform teaching and learning.

With only one part time mental health specialist and one counsellor there is limited support for students which creates pressure both for the staff and the students on the waiting lists. It is clear that emergency cases are prioritised and students can be seen or contacted by phone out of hours if necessary.

The role of Student Services Manager is a very multidisciplinary at HAU and although the team she manages have many roles, the limited time staff have to deal with student's problems appears to be becoming more challenging. The holistic approach to support, using many agencies to help identify a student's needs is important at the university but it relies on the fact the HEI is small and staff have the time to communicate concerns. Whilst the counsellors keep their own records, there is no central data base to record students seeking or engaging with support when signposted to the services available.

All the staff interviewed identified that many students find the transition to university difficult and many have unrealistic expectations of the type and level of support that can be provided. Unrealistic student expectations and student resilience will be discussed later in this chapter and in the final discussion.

5.4.3.1 Keele University Staff Portraits

1. Keele Mental Health Counsellor

I. Tell me about your role at Keele University?

This staff member has extensive experience of mental health support. She stated that she saw over 30 students a week of which a third are new cases. She liaises with external services and has close links to fast track students for external support if there is need for rapid psychological reports which have, on average, a waiting list of three weeks. She is supported in her role by two mental health support workers.

This staff member acknowledged that there was huge pressure on services not just at the university but nationally in the NHS.

"I've been seeing a lot more complex problems coming through and I tend to fill the gap as well"

"We do get really good access"

The staff interviewed commented on the 'fitness to study policy' at Keele University, where a local Psychiatrist is paid by the university to undertake reports for students on site, which reduces the stress of leaving the site and long waiting lists in the NHS.

II. How do students access your support?

The mental health support centre is located away from the main campus thoroughfare and is a well-established, private and safe area for students. The service is promoted via the Keele Learning Environment (KLE), Student Services and also available through online registration.

III. What sort of problems do you see and support?

Problems identified were eating disorders, self-harm, suicide, low mood, depression and anxiety. They also see many students with spectrum disorders such as autism who can suffer from anxiety and they also find the transition to HE challenging.

She commented that they often see students becoming dependent on support and that there has been an increase in demand as students become more aware of problems and possibly the help available.

"I think there is a need (for support) but, I think students can become dependent on support and I try, with my team, to try and get them to be more resilient".

When asked about the statement on resilience she commented

"Self-reliant. So, it's about recovery and what you can do to make things better and improve so, they don't become as dependent. But I think there's definitely mental health needs because that's increased. Especially with eating disorders, there's definitely needs there and risk and things like that".

The staff mentioned that many more students are disclosing pre-existing conditions when they start at university and commented that mental health awareness is far more common than it used to be.

However, she stated that a lot of students do not share mental health issues with their families, especially international students and this puts more pressure on the university to provide support.

IV. How realistic do you think students are about the support and allowances that we can make for students at university?

"I don't think they're realistic really. We get a lot of people coming around exam time when they want ECs... (Extenuating Circumstances allowance). I think they expect a lot really. Especially now they have to pay fees as well, I think that's changed things a lot."

When asked about staffing, she stated there was no waiting list for mental health support but she was aware there was a waiting list for students to see counselling support. Whilst there is a crisis team on call out of hours and they experience four to five incidents per semester, having a professional mental health specialist on site 24/7 for students not in crisis but needing some support would be useful.

Staff in the mental health team do not receive any feedback from students on effectiveness, but she feels the service is a success and most students do improve in their mental health with many students no longer in need of the service after gaining initial support.

When asked about adjustment being made for students with mental health problems the staff commented that students should have to do the university assessment such as exams as *"too many adjustments are made and I don't think it's helpful in the long term for people"*

2. Keele Student Counsellor

I. Tell me about yourself and your role?

The staff interviewed specialises in a Psychodynamic⁶⁰ approach to student support with previous experience in schools but has dealt with clients of all ages with various issues. She describes her

⁶⁰ <https://www.simplypsychology.org/psychodynamic.html>

support work as “preventative” in order for students to “fully transition to well-being”. Whilst the support provided is only for students there has been discussion about providing support for staff dealing with students with complex personality disorders.

She sees 22 – 24 students per week (50 min each) and after an initial assessment, students return for six to nine weeks of support sessions. Students requiring urgent support are seen by the mental health team. Students access support through self-referral (website), Student Services booking and via personal tutor advice.

II. What student problems do you support?

Many problems were identified, including anxiety, relationship issues, early childhood trauma, bereavement, family breakup, family dynamics (e.g. sibling with high needs) and bullying.

III. What sort of aspects of their studies do you feel it affects?

“Concentration, motivation, organisation, predominantly, motivation being probably very high there, particularly those coming with a low mood. Anxiety, difficulty concentrating. Because of other issues, perhaps chaotic lives or it may be because they've had difficult lives, they've got OCD and so they're so busy bringing order to other things that they can't bring an order to their work. Usually they can't meet deadlines, so they're having lots of ECs. They will, potentially, not be progressing and certainly underachieving, not able to reach their full potential.”

It was interesting to note that the counsellor also stressed that

“Transition is a big thing, transition, adjustment, child/adult work. Essentially, what we receive is a student who is still, at some levels, functioning, emotionally or psychologically, at that child level. We're trying to help them to mature into that adult”.

She also mentioned that there was a high demand from medical students for additional counselling due to the nature of their course and profession.

IV. Should we support students?

The counsellor was adamant that the university has to support students as staff have a responsibility to send people into the world not only with intellectual and cognitive skills, but also life skills. She considered that encouraging students to get support at university was important in *“normalising accessing support”* as a life skill.

V. What are the range of services provided in counselling?

There are a wide range of staff providing counselling at Keele University. Details of the department structure is given in Appendix 2

“Therapy is more proactive. It's very much centred on their behaviours, their thought patterns, the things that they're doing and saying”

Staff identified were trained as person-centred counsellors, psychodynamic counsellors, solution-focused counsellors, but all staff practice eclectically. There are two therapists who specialise in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). Staff refer students for support internally after initial assessment so they see the most appropriate staff. If someone has experienced a trauma, then they are referred to the staff interviewed for Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR)⁶¹.

The staff interviewed commented on the high numbers of self-harm incidents at Keele and that the support service brought in a specialist to deal with students who were self-harming.

The impact of social media was mentioned as an issue for counselling students. As an example, a student claiming they had *‘genetic depression’* as there was Schizophrenia in their family indicates the student’s unfounded concerns that they would also develop the condition and needed a label for their concerns.

The counselling staff interviewed, indicated that cultural diffidence for students sometimes required specialist support. In some cultures, seeking support and acknowledging personal problems is not tolerable. As an example, both Muslim men and women were cited as students who find it difficult to get support and confidentiality is a *“huge issue for them”*

⁶¹ <https://www.tevv.nhs.uk/services/what-is-eye-movement-desensitisation-reprocessing-emdr/>

There was also discussion about the strong LGBT group at Keele and the additional cultural problems for Muslim men who are homosexual. The staff indicated that it is important in counselling to send a student back to their home country and culture after university, with the skills to maintain their own safety and an improved sense of self.

VI. What else do you feel is needed at Keele to support students more effectively?

The Counsellor identified that staff had more than doubled in four years at the time of this interview and stated *“I actually think that we’ve got one of the tightest systems that I have been involved in from the point of view of the therapy.”*

She did identify the need for more psychoeducation training with staff and personal tutors who often are the first people to deal with the students and she also commented on a better communication system with staff would be useful.

Therapy staff receive feedback on their student support via a specialist counselling software system Titanium, which the students complete an online survey following treatment.

3. Keele Student Services Staff

I. Tell me about Student Services and how the system works?

Keele Student Services is located in the Tawney building centrally located on campus. Originally called Student Support, the name was changed to Student Services to avoid the stigma of the support name. The entrance to the building has a reception desk where support staff can guide students to the correct support and help book appointments etc. There are also computers available for students to book appointment themselves or it can be accessed remotely off site via the VLE. Welfare staff are available to provide additional guidance where necessary. Student Services is seen as the first port of call for students requiring advice and works on a triage basis with students who need urgent support or advice, getting it as quickly as possible. Staff working in Student Services receive full training in customer service, people management and specialist areas such as autism awareness and sexual violence.

In terms of access to provision: Status letters, accommodation advice, change in modules and courses, academic and pastoral support, financial and legal support are all available in the one centre. Any specialist learning support needs are referred to a centre nearby for a student who may need additional exam arrangements etc. The staff commented that they try to make nervous students feel welcome and that the TV and drinks available helps reduce the stress for some students. The Student Service also arranges daily drop-in sessions for support

“They’ll come into something like a drop-in room like this, and they can just talk about whatever it is they want. Actually if they’re talking to our welfare specialist and the welfare specialist identifies and recognises, “actually, this needs to go over to the mental health team”, then that’s where that interaction will happen, that the pass over of responsibility and support will happen”.

“Sometimes, the welfare team have even walked students over to ensure that, because as you rightly say, we understand that that is a very, very long way in anyone’s mind who might be upset, distressed, to be able to get across there. So, it’s really interacting with the need, as it arises.”

Students booked to see mental health or counselling attend the sessions in another building at the edge of the campus, which aids privacy. In addition to the Tawney centre there are online help guides available on the VLE.

II. What is the demand for your Services?

The staff stated there was high demand for the service at Keele with 30,000 enquiries per year (in person, via email and online). It was estimated that between 70-90% of issues could be resolved using the triage system in place.

“Whatever the issue is, my team are there to receive, to accept, to make sure they’re (students) comfortable, and to get them the right help.”

In addition to the Student Services role and pastoral care provision, the Academic Services support is in the same building with appointments also made directly or via Student Services with the additional option of short 20 minute drop in session for academic support.

The staff identified that all meetings and bookings for students are confidential and comply with the data protection policy at the university. The demanding times for Student Services was identified at the start of the new term and during the exams when the limited space at the reception area in Tawney was insufficient. As an alternative, during the Freshers period the exhibition space in the main building was used to promote the Student Service at Keele

III. What opportunities are there to develop the Student Services further

The limited reception space was already identified but the suggestion of more of a hub environment would be useful. The example was that the Careers Service was now located in the library and should be more central with all the other services in Tawney.

With regard to development of the service the staff interviewee state

"I think we've probably taken it a little bit further now in terms of including pastoral care rather than just, "I need this, I need that." We've actually, we see the student as a whole, and the student comes, just doesn't come needing a letter. You've then got all sorts, and we have tried to offer that full service. We are a very, very lean machine, and I think we're really effective. I think really responsive".

The staff finally remarked that with the nature of the student body changing, the Student Service provision would need to adapt to this and the increase in demand requiring the service.

4. Keele Staff Personal Tutor

I. What is your role as a staff member at Keele University?

The staff member interviewed identified himself as a Senior Teaching Fellow with many years of past experience working with students on a pastoral basis. With reference to his past role he stated.

“That was really interesting because it gave a perspective on struggling students that you just don’t get as an academic because they hide from you when they’re struggling and you’re their teacher.”

The staff member explained that academic staff get allocated tutees which tend to be from the academic staff specialist subject department but sometimes with dual honours students, the tutee may be from a different subject area.

He stated he had 25 personal tutees from across all years allocated but recognised this is higher than most staff who have other responsibilities such as programme responsibilities and/or research. Post graduate students are allocated their course co-ordinator for support.

II. How does the Personal Tutoring system work at Keele?

The first face to face meeting between a student and their allocated tutor is mandatory and after this initial contact, then any interaction is on a needs basis.

“It’s like advice only works when it’s asked for.”

He maintains contact with all his allocated students by email and advises support if necessary. All new staff are given a Personal Tutor manual to outline their role and responsibilities and to signpost them to the various support services available at Keele. New staff are also met by the Director of Teaching and Learning to explain their role as Personal Tutors.

III. What do you think is important in your role as Personal Tutor?

The staff member stated that setting boundaries in the student - staff relationship is important and staff understanding the limitations of their role and skills.

“I suppose my main message is the business about the boundaries of the personal tutor’s role, so the point about it’s about academic tuition and you should be very wary of going much beyond that unless you’ve got the skills”.

In advising new staff he gave an interesting insight into the issue of boundaries

"I would also sometimes tell them (new staff) stories about people who thought they knew about mental health because they had a mentally ill relative or something like that, and took on way more than they should - which was no good for them and no good for the student".

But added

"I probably take on more than I tell everybody else to".

IV. What problems do you see when students contact you?

Various problems but mainly depression, mental health crises, immigration, housing and legal advice.

"Well the biggest one is just depression and there's this enormous mental health crisis, isn't there, for young people. I think it's an interesting challenge as to the level of response or how we do anything constructive in those kinds of areas".

He identified that there are good support mechanisms in place to refer the students to and that the Student Union were very good at providing advice and support.

Students have the opportunity to extend or defer assessment work and the decision although taken by the Course Tutor, the Personal Tutor can advise on getting the evidence for mitigating circumstances and the university regulations etc.

V. Do you think the Personal Tutoring system works effectively at Keele?

The staff member interviewed stated that prior to 2005, there was no formal personal tutoring system in place at Keele but subject schools (departments) did provide some specialist support. It was noticed at Keele University at this time that there was a high level of student withdrawals from courses and there was no clear reason identified.

The current personal tutoring system was developed at Keele using guidance from the 2006 publication: Personal Tutoring in Higher Education by Thomas and Hixenbaugh.

Prior to developing the new tutoring system, student withdrawals were high and the staff developed a withdrawal questionnaire to try and find the reasons

"I think that prior to that, the university simply hadn't been aware that we were haemorrhaging students in large numbers".

"The other thing we were dealing with in student support was non-progression and advising students on appeals and so on. I became aware of how appallingly managed- well not appallingly managed but what a bureaucratic process that was rather than a people process.....that was quite a progressive period".

The interviewee commented on the fact that staff do not get any time on their workloads for personal tutoring and although expected of staff, some staff did not take the role seriously. He made some really insightful and interesting comments about how students move unofficially from poor staff to seek staff that are more empathic and supportive, so the good staff get overloaded sometimes with needy students.

"You really just can't be equitable about this. It's just that some people are good at it and some aren't. Some like students and some want to keep them as far away as possible. As a profession, we're judgement machines and that can be quite devastating, especially for more fragile students."

"I think there are staff who teach as if we have the students we'd like to have rather than the students we do have. They assume that everyone is like them".

"I think some students will be needy if they can get away with it but the problem is colleagues letting them get away with it".

The staff identified that it is important to create reasonable expectations with students' right from the start of the personal tutoring process and to make boundaries clear.

As a result of the introduced personal tutoring system at Keele there have been fewer withdrawals which is important for the TEF but he identified there are problems with the support system with long waiting times for counselling on campus.

All meetings with students are documented by individual tutors for 'institutional memory' and consistency but it is unclear how this is monitored across the university as each School (Department) organises their own personal tutoring system. Whilst the university uses e-Vision⁶² as a data base for finances, modules, timetable and personal records – there are no central records held on each student to show engagement with support or to alert staff to students not attending classes. In summary the staff felt the university did provide a good nurturing environment for students.

"I think we are a very supportive institution. I think there's a reason why we do so well in the national student survey because the kind of student that we have- if I can outrageously stereotype- are bright kids who lack self-confidence".

5.4.3.2 Analysis of the Keele Staff interviews

The portraits of the staff interviewed provided some useful and authoritative comments to analyse and evaluate.

Several of the observations made in the interviews by Keele staff are interrelated and in many cases support the view that Keele provides a very good support service to its students, although they appreciate that the service is under pressure with increasing student numbers and a broader student population, with many more students often presenting more complex additional needs.

It is clear from the comments made by the academic staff that with engaged and skilled staff as personal tutors, referring the students on for additional support and making clear expectation of what staff can provide, is essential to student retention and success. Both the latter were identified as former problems at Keele and the policy and practice to provide an effective Personal Tutoring system was developed. There does seem to be an imbalance where good academic staff seem to be overloaded with taking on additional students to support whilst others not wishing to engage with students and avoid any contact. This raises the question of whether that staff do not want to

⁶² <https://www.keele.ac.uk/media/keeleuniversity/fait/it/scims/evisionstudents2017.pdf>

support students or do not have the skills to do so, should be made to take on the role and the impact this can have on the student they have allocated to them. This imbalance and possible solutions will be discussed later in the final chapter.

The two main points of contact for students at Keele are the allocated Personal Tutor and the Student Services Welcome Desk in the Tawney building. The support system provided by the initial contact at Keele appears to work well with an effective triage system and skilled, welcoming front-of-house staff who can also just sit and befriend nervous students, unsure what to do or where to get help. In addition, at Keele University there is the integration of the Student Union services and the wide range of support it provides via ASK⁶³ in addition to personal tutors and specialist staff support.

With regards to the specialist support, there seems in the Student Services department a wide range of mental health and counselling staff who can not only address the needs of students but also refer them to specialist external services locally. In addition, many other specialist staff are available for support with housing problems, financial queries and any legal issues such as visas etc.

All four staff interviewed came across as being extremely positive, not only in their statements about the students and the running of the support system, but also in their body language and persona. However, they did identify weaknesses in the support system with some long waiting lists for counselling.

The increased demand on the services and staff time, particularly with increased incidence of mental health problems in HE was highlighted by all staff as well as the unrealistic expectation of some students.

Staff identified also that the increase in fees in HE was suggested to be a prominent driver for students to complain about the service provided. Some students consider that as they are paying

⁶³ <https://keelesu.com/advice/>

higher fees for their education and incurring long term debt, the university support service needs to be provided when and where they want it. Again, this links both to the student expectation and personal resilience which will be evaluated further in Chapter 6.

5.4.3.3 Analysis of the interviews between the two universities

It is evident from the interviews at both universities that there are very differing systems of supporting the students and most importantly signposting them to support.

The central hub of the Tawney building at Keele University providing a one stop shop for any student requiring support of any kind is creditable. However, this system works efficiently only for students who self-refer or who are signposted by Personal Tutors who show an interest in supporting the students to get specialised help, whether it is financial, housing, health and well-being. Some staff do not undertake their role as Personal Tutors in a professional manner, which ultimately leads to students trying to find other staff they can talk to and in the worst scenario, leave the university due to lack of support.

In comparison Harper Adams University has changed its personal tutoring system to ensure only a few staff support students which allows consistency and the students to be more familiar with staff who often teach them on their courses. This practice means that staff have far more students to support but additional hours are allocated to staff on workloads for the responsibility roles of Senior Tutor and Course Manager. It appears from the interviews that at HAU, support for mental health and counselling with only two staff members is very under resourced per capita compared to Keele University with its larger number of support staff and wider range of skills sets for support. Since Student Services at Harper Adams is also closely aligned to the accommodation, issues with new students in halls are more easily identified with the support of the final year student wardens on site. Keele accommodation is managed by staff and it is apparent from the interviews that HAU students find it easier to ask a fellow student warden for support and advice in some instances.

In addition, Keele University has the extra support provided by the SU via ASK. Again, having support via the SU which is away from the relationships with academic staff, may also provide an additional mechanism to advise students, particularly if related to the staff issues.

From the staff interviews, a common feature of both institutions is the unrealistic expectation of students both in terms of demand and waiting time for support.

5.5 National Student Survey (NSS) Analysis

In addition to the data collected through the mixed method research, it was considered useful to review the full NSS data for each HEI in this study. The only relevant questions which link to pastoral care are those which relate to academic support at each HEI. The NSS Academic Support questions are given below, with students scoring a range of responses from: definitely agree, agree, neutral, disagree or definitely disagree.

Academic support questions

12. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.

13. I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course.

14. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course.

All the above questions could also relate to pastoral support and it would be useful for the NSS to determine what additional support students' access outside the questions considered as 'academic' targeted solely at their education and course studies.

In addition, question 21 in the Learning Community group asks

21. I feel part of a community of staff and students.

Again, this question could relate to both staff and peer support which may enhance the students feeling of self-worth, improved communication and confidence and a willingness to engage with

both internal and external community provision. This may also include support agencies within the university as well as engagement with personal tutors.

Data from the last two years (2018 & 2019) from the questions outlined, was collated for all student responses across all course areas in both institutions. The percentage of students agreeing positively to the questions was calculated and presented in the graphs below. Previous years of NSS data could not be used as the question type changed in 2018 and years are not directly comparable. Whilst it is only the last two years data it does show some differences both between universities in this study and also years (although cohorts can vary hugely each year).

The results are shown in the following Figure 39 to Figure 43.

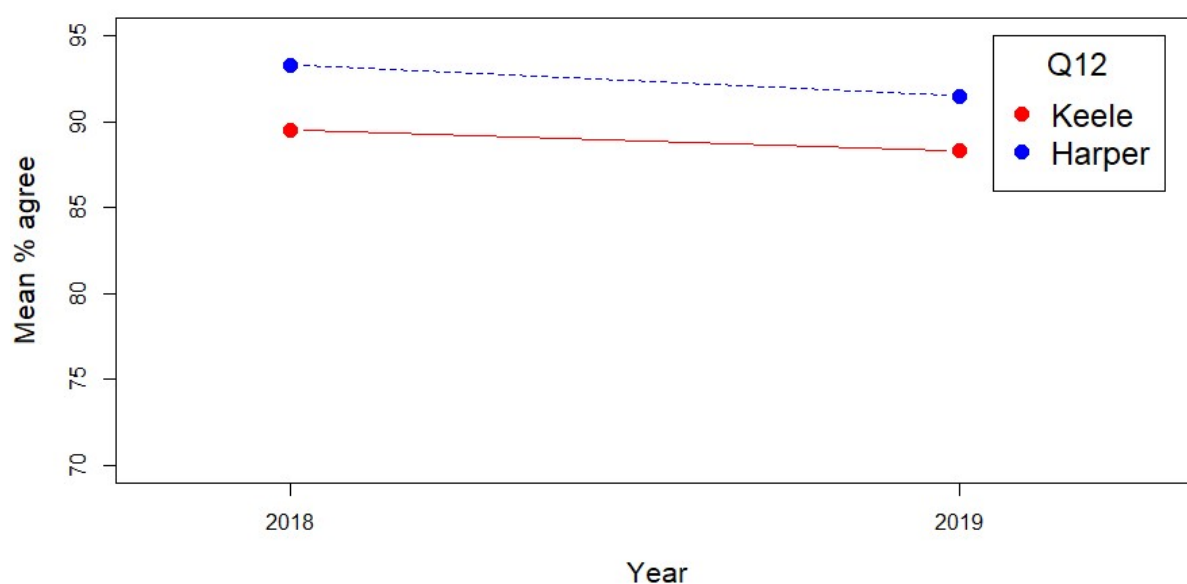


Figure 39. NSS Question 12. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.

Analysis

Both HEIs show a high satisfaction (>88%) with being able to contact staff with HAU having a slightly higher satisfaction rating. This may reflect both the smaller institution and numbers of staff which may make access and contact easier for students seeking academic support. At both universities the

satisfaction has fallen slightly between 2018 and 2019 NSS surveys which may be reflect changing student expectations or just cohort differences in two years of survey data.

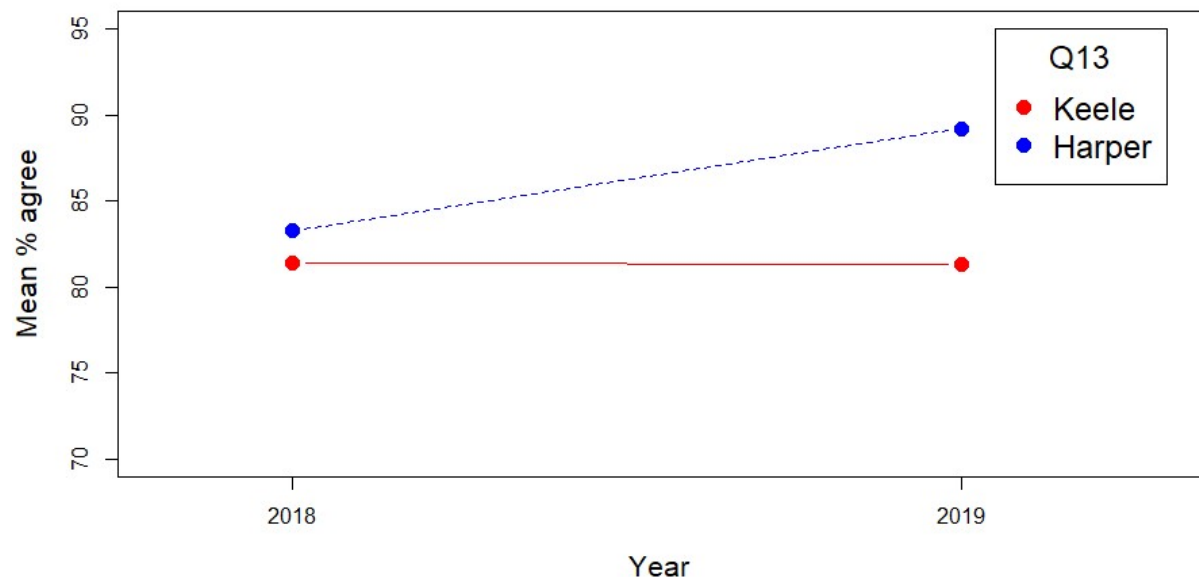


Figure 40. NSS Question 13. I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course.

Analysis

Course advice and guidance can come from many areas of the university, including personal tutors, academic staff, the careers services and counselling support services. From the data Keele responses at 82% satisfaction remain constant over the two years, HAU responses appear to have improved by 5% over the two year survey. It is unclear from the questions whether the advice and guidance relates to modules and options within a course, which is likely to come from course programme managers. It could perhaps be reflecting on the wider support with regards to performance and success, which may come from academics or academic support services.

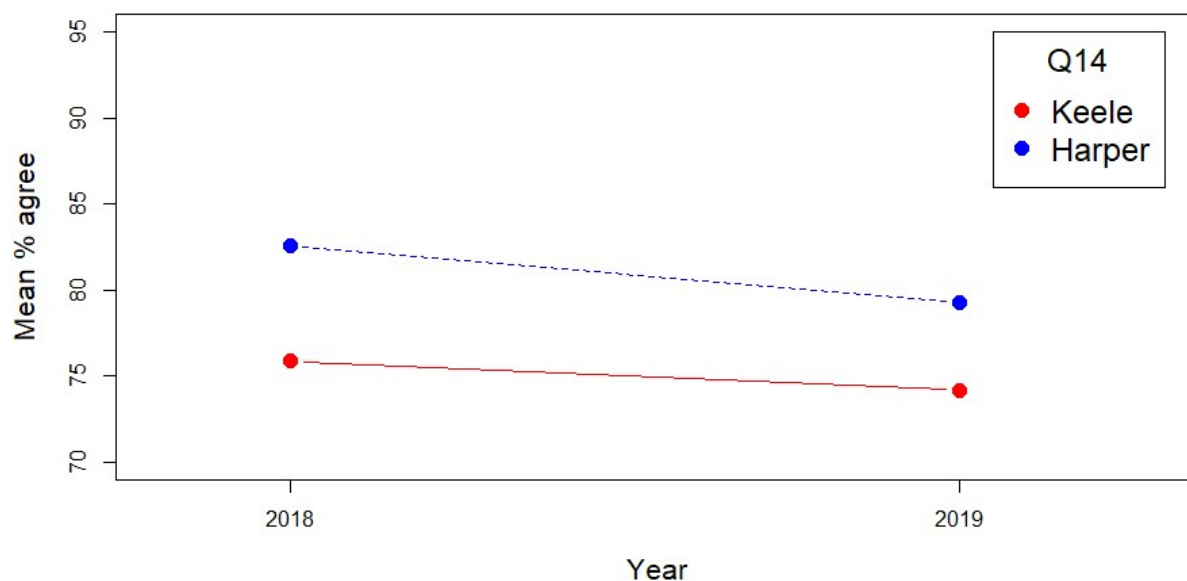


Figure 41. NSS Question 14. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course.

Analysis

Study choices again may reflect on who is providing the students with information. Both universities show a small decline in satisfaction with the advice sought and it may be unclear for the students who they approach for advice. It may be possible that some well-meaning academic staff are directing students to study choices that are not appropriate or that students are not aware of what support is available and when.

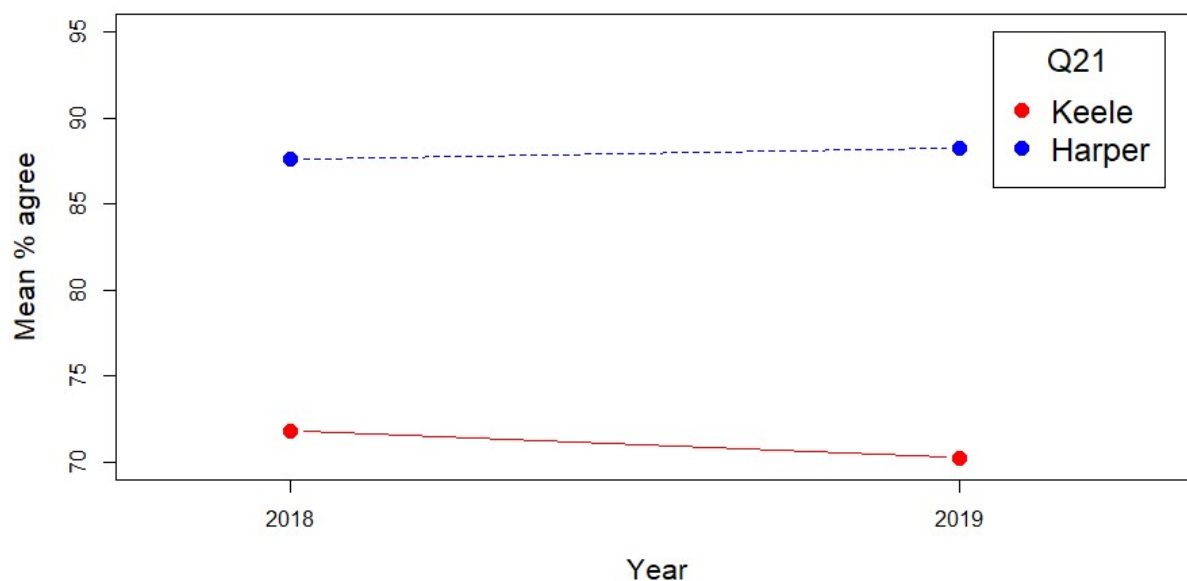


Figure 42. NSS Question 21. I feel part of a community of staff and students.

Analysis

The data from the NSS survey shows a consistently high satisfaction (>87%) at HAU with feeling part of a community. Given the small specialist nature of the university, on site campus accommodation for all students in year 1, fewer commuter students and smaller course sizes and high staff contact due to practical classes and fieldwork, it is not surprising that students know each other and the staff well.

The students also have university wide social activities such as the themed balls and activities to include students on exchange programmes.

Keele University, at 72% satisfaction is still relatively high for an HEI in the UK (NSS 2016). This university by its very nature as a large institution with many varied courses and a wider diversity in its student population, may find that providing a sense of community for a students a challenge.

Students may find 'community' in a numbers of areas including their course, accommodation, Student Union, clubs and social activities and the responses to the survey question for both

universities might be how the students regard the word 'community' and how much they engage themselves to become part of the student community.

A 2018 Student Experience Survey undertaken by Times Higher Education (THE)⁶⁴ looked at four areas of student satisfaction with their social life at universities across the UK

- I. Good social life
- II. Good community atmosphere
- III. Good extracurricular activities / societies
- IV. Good environment on campus / around university

The highest societal experience score of 89.1 was awarded to Loughborough University. Harper

Adams University was awarded 86.1 (ranked 6) and Keele University was awarded 81.8 and ranked =33

The THE survey also ascertained student views on student welfare at their institutions.

Students were asked to provide a rating for the following questions

- I. Personal requirements catered for
- II. Good welfare support

The best universities for student welfare 2018 were ranked and HAU was ranked number 1 with a score of 83.4 and Keele University ranked =33 with a score of 75.9.

An article by Mills (2018) in the Times Higher Education and discussed earlier in the section on student mental health in the literature review, reinforces the need for *'every university to have its own well developed strategy for emotional well-being in its student population, including a student counselling service, an anonymous helpline, a range of online self-help resources and even a student staffed outreach programme'*

⁶⁴ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/best-universities/student-experience-survey-2018-best-uk-universities-student-social-life>

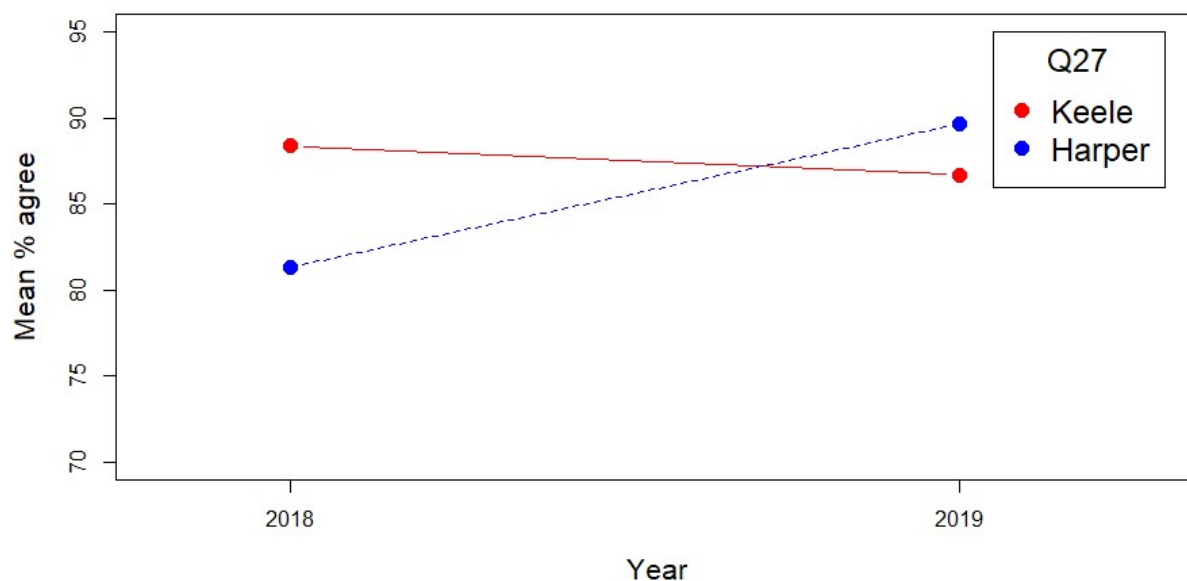


Figure 43. NSS Question 27. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my course

Analysis

The final overall satisfaction questions asked by the NSS show a good satisfaction rating for both universities with Keele University with a rating of 87% over the last two years and HAU increasing from 82% to 89%.

Overall satisfaction with the quality of a course is an area which needs much more investigation to see whether the earlier comments in the survey about teaching and support are reflected in the overall rating.

5.6 Chapter Summary

An extensive amount of data collected and analysed has given both qualitative and quantitative information to meet the research objectives. Whilst using three different methods to collect information for this research, triangulation of the data to correlate the findings from the three methods will be discussed further in Chapter 6. The rich and robust information achieved from the surveys and interviews, combined with the overall university NSS figures gives a critical insight into

student perceptions of support at their university and the university mode of delivery to provide it effectively.

The key points which have come out of the research results and analysis in this chapter, are that whilst both universities use very different models and frameworks to support and manage students, on the whole, the students are satisfied with the service. It is evident from both the qualitative and quantitative data and by triangulating the data, that both universities are facing additional challenges with increased student numbers and student expectations of a more effective service.

The research shows there are clearly some shortfalls in both HEIs in communication, management and review of processes, training of staff, data recording and resources allocated to the growing needs of an effective HE support provision.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Final Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter of the thesis will draw together the key points from the research analysis and discuss the findings with regards to the research aims and objectives. It will also outline how the research relates to the current work of others and the contribution the research and the recommendations will make to effective student personal tutoring in UK universities. It is also important in this chapter to evaluate the validity of the outcomes. The final summary will include an additional section to address the Covid 19 pandemic, which has had a huge impact on UK universities, both for the academic teaching but also the provision of support.

6.2 Evaluation of the Research design

The research design was informed through the research of others in the area of student support. The online survey captured data from a wide range of students at both universities on all courses and at different stages in their academic journey, from first years to postgraduates. Time, accessibility and resources limited the research sampling to two universities, which fortunately for the study are very different in the nature of their courses and student population.

The sample frame for the online survey of 100 students at each university exceeded that expected, although given the student numbers that the survey was sent to, this response rate of 116 students (4% response rate at HAU) and 142 students (1.4% response rate at Keele), was a little disappointing. University students are now experiencing survey overload for all types of questionnaires and research undertaken at university (Adams and Umbach 2011), so it is satisfying that the sample frame was exceeded. The focus groups and interviews with both staff and students progressed well with no issues apart from timetabling interviewee availability. Creating the research design to include three methods of data collection, both qualitative and quantitative provide a rich source of robust data to analyse in many forms from statistical analysis to individual portraits of staff and

students. The wealth of quotes provided by the interviewees at both institutions provide a personal voice to further support the research objectives and validate the other research findings.

6.3 Meeting the research aims and objectives

The research aim was to explore the of range pastoral support provided by universities and to ascertain how it is used by students at all levels in their study programmes.

The primary research objectives which needed to be achieved are listed below in the form of two principal questions and three subsidiary questions, which will be addressed separately. Through each objective the evaluation of the support provision and perceived effectiveness in each HEI will be addressed, evidenced by the research results.

As a caveat, it is also important to consider not only the limited qualitative data retrieved from a small group of students in each HEI, but also the fact that results could possibly being affected by the distinct institutional types and cultures in the universities used in this research.

6.3.1 What is the structure and organisation of pastoral support and academic support in higher education institutions?

This objective was achieved in Chapter 3, giving details of the support in each HEI in this study.

It is also supported by the staff interviews, particularly the specialist staff support provided within each university.

6.3.2 How do students engage with pastoral and academic support in the institutions?

With regard to:

- i. Is pastoral support and academic support perceived as separate or combined?
How is this linked to the organisational structure provided in each HEI
- ii. Is it clear who students should go to for both pastoral and academic support?
Who is the facilitator and is this role clearly articulated in the University policy?

- iii. Are student perceptions of effectiveness and quality of provision correlated with the structure and organisation of how support is provided?

Before addressing the individual key objectives, it is important to give a broad overview of the students perception of support in their own HEI.

The research in this study shows that in general, most students are satisfied with the support provision at their own university. Whilst there was some dissent amongst a few students in the online survey, focus groups and interviews, it is clear that the majority of students are satisfied with the support they receive. In comparing the universities in the study, the online survey showed some interesting differences between HAU and Keele University with statistical analysis showing a greater use of pastoral support at Keele compared to HAU, but that Keele students were more dissatisfied with the service they experienced. By using a mixed method approach to collecting the research data, triangulation of the online survey, the focus group and student interview results, it has been possible to gain a greater insight into the differences between the two universities and support mechanisms. Triangulation (Tashakkori and Teddie 1998) in this research has provided in-depth data to meet the research objectives, which is both robust in nature and valid.

The difference in perception of the value of the support at Keele may be reflected in the student population at this university. With a large population of more diverse students at Keele University, it may be possible that there is a higher demand for the support services, but when accessed are disappointed that they do not get the results they want (maybe in terms of the time waiting for support or meeting their needs).

As discussed, the analysis of this in the results section, the difference between the universities may be due to the range of students completing the online survey and voicing their dissatisfaction with unrealistic expectations of what the support service can provide. This supports the research findings of Hixenbaugh *et al* (2008); Small 2013, Webb *et al* (2013); McIntosh (2017); Webb *et al* (2017) and Lochtie *et al* (2018). Harper Adams University is a much smaller university compared to Keele and

although has a much smaller support provision, compared to Keele, it seems to be more valued by the students. This could be a result of the smaller student community and better communication and this has been verified by feedback from the focus group at Harper Adams University.

The student responses in interviews in both the focus groups and one to one interviews felt that it was essential that universities provide additional personal support alongside academic support for their studies and that they have a duty of care towards students. This is supported by AMOSSHE, the Student Services Organisation which states on their website that universities have a duty of care at common law *'to act reasonably to protect the health, safety and welfare of its students'*.

From the research results, it is important for universities to ensure that not only is the service provided but that it is easily accessed and effective.

In general, the staff responses for the research were very positive. All staff were clearly under pressure in terms of time and numbers of students, many of whom have complex personal issues, not easily resolved by the services available at the university in the time expected by the students.

In particular the increase in mental health problems experienced by students now in HE were highlighted by several staff. For staff involved in the personal tutor/student facing role, the emphasis was made in the interviews of the importance of having the right staff to support the students. This is supported by research and studies by many other academics including Owen (2002); Stephen, O'Connell, and Hall (2008); Thomas (2012) and Ghenghesh (2017) who have highlighted the essential qualities in staff who support students.

Whilst addressing the key objectives of this research, other results from the research which link to the objectives, will also need to be evaluated and discussed.

6.3.2.1 Key Objective: Is pastoral support and academic support perceived as separate or combined?

At Keele University, the organisational structure of pastoral and academic support is provided by allocated personal tutors. This is in contrast with HAU, where course tutors have a specific pastoral role and students approach their teaching staff for course specific support and academic guidance staff for study skills support.

At HAU, 63% and at Keele University 59% of the students were clear about the difference between pastoral or personal support and academic support. These are both important figures and link both to this key research objective about the nature of support and the following key objective about the person they see for support – effectively the facilitator. If students do not understand the difference, then it therefore follows that they are unlikely to seek support from the right person. If that key person, a personal tutor (Keele) or course tutor (HAU) lacks the qualities, skills and information to direct the student to the correct support (personal or academic) or give the support themselves, then it is possible the student will not get the help they need. This raises the question about why the students are unclear about whether support is separate or combined and ultimately to question whether this matters as long as they get the support they need? It is this last point that needs to be addressed in terms of sign- posting students. What is most critical is that the University makes support of any kind, seamlessly accessible to all students. If the support within the HEI is a combined service with a named person allocated to the student, acting to direct the student to suitable academic or personal support, then there should be no misunderstandings. As mentioned in the research findings, having staff allocated to students in their subject specialism allows a close synergy of the roles for both personal and academic support and allows the student to see a familiar face for help.

This key objectives from the research is linked to Question 11a in the online survey asking students if they considered there was a link between personal problems and academic achievement. The

majority of students did feel that there was a close link between how they succeed academically and problems arising in their personal lives. This is supported by the research of Eleyan and Eleyan (2011) mentioned earlier, where the combined roles of mentor, tutor and coach can have both passive and active roles in supporting the students both academically and personally. What appears to be essential from the student feedback from this research is that an effective person is assigned to the facilitator role (supported by the research and studies of Stephen *et al*, 2008; Small 2013; Calcagno *et al*, 2017; Thomas *et al*, 2017). This is critical during the transition period when starting at university and links directly to retention and success in HE (Thomas *et al*, 2017). It is important that students develop a sense of wellbeing and connectedness (Thomas 2017b) with their new university and that they are fully integrated in the HE community.

6.3.2.2 Key Objective: Is it clear who students should go to for both pastoral and academic support?

The online survey data supported by the focus groups and interviews, showed that the students would approach their allocated support tutor if needed (Question 4 on the survey) with a greater proportion using Student Services (ASK) at Keele compared to HAU. This may reflect the wide range of staff available as personal tutors at Keele or may be a result of a wider range of services provided in the ASK hub (such as visa applications, changing modules, fees advice etc.) or both. Most students were aware they were allocated a named member of staff but of some concern is that 20% of HAU and 10% of Keele students either said 'no' or 'do not know' which raises the question of communication and information for the student (or perhaps the students not needing to engage with support). Feedback from the Keele student focus group identified the lack of consistency in the dissimilar systems of allocated staff support across the different departments within the university. This raises the issue that at Keele there is not a consistent policy with regards to the personal tutor role/allocation across the University as a whole. The students also felt that waiting lists for specialist support, such as mental health were long but this is refuted by the specialist staff, citing students being unrealistic as to waiting times to be seen.

6.3.2.3 Key Objective: Are student perceptions of effectiveness and quality of provision correlated with the structure and organisation of how support is provided?

This was the overarching key objective to this research regarding student perception of the support service at their university. Whilst Keele students use the Support Services more at their university, the research shows that through the online survey and focus groups, they were less satisfied, criticising the provision and the long waiting lists. However, given that anonymous online surveys can include some bias towards dissatisfaction, it is clear that there is an easily accessible and professionally organised provision of personal and special needs support at Keele University (as shown in the Student Services structure in Appendix 2). In some cases, the dissatisfaction may lie more with the facilitators, the allocated personal tutors not fulfilling their role or personal differences between staff and students, rather than the actual provision which seems really well structured and resourced at Keele (as identified by both the majority of students and staff questioned). In comparison at HAU, the students in the online survey, focus groups and interviews seems very satisfied with the structure of support provision, although there was some personal dissatisfaction voiced by a few students. Again, this might be down to unrealistic expectations and personal differences with staff but taking into account student numbers, HAU has far fewer resources for supporting students compared to Keele University. Harper Adams appears to have very little onsite resource for student mental health support with only one part-time member of staff and only one counsellor for the whole university (at the time of this research). Resilience, as discussed in section 2.5.4, is a key skill which all students need to develop when they start at university (Dutton 2004, Arvanitakis and Hornsby 2016, Duckworth 2016, Thomas 2017). It is therefore critical that the personal tutoring framework helps and supports students to increase their personal levels of confidence and independence.

Within any organisational structure, there will be areas for review and improvement and it is therefore essential that there is continual monitoring of use of the resources and students feedback as to their effectiveness, but also with the caveat, that you cannot please all the people all the time!

There are many challenges that universities face with regards to supporting students. Both universities in this research have cited the increasing problem of coping with increasing numbers of students with mental health problems, including eating disorders and self-harm. Whilst both institutions have clear fitness to study policies, many more students are requesting allowances for late submitted or deferred work where they have a valid reason which is causing additional work for staff.

Resourcing courses and staffing are key challenges in universities across the UK today with restricted budgets and targets on student retention and success and the new OfS review in 2020. It is evident that until recently, the area of personal tutoring has been little researched and the effective models and frameworks at universities for delivery of support has not been well known.

6.4 Contribution to the Sector

There have been many outstanding texts and research with regards to the personal tutoring role and evaluation of what makes an effective personal tutor (Earwaker 1992/1993, Wheeler and Birtle 1993, Bell 1996, Thomas and Hixenbaugh 2006, Neville 2007, Wisker *et al* 2008, Morgan 2012, Stork and Walker 2015, Mair 2016 and Lochtie *et al* 2018). However, at the start of this research process in May 2015 with the research thesis proposal, there was very little UK research looking at personal tutoring from the student's perspective. Much of the previous research in this area has been focussed on academic achievement and student progression with some work e.g. York and Thomas 2003, Wilcox *et al* 2005, York and Longden 2004 and 2008 highlighting the impact of transition to HE, widening participation, developing independent learning and HE skills with some links to social support networks in the HEIs. Currently, there is active research in both personal tutoring and pastoral support by UKAT and its members across the UK and several projects link well to the new professional framework for advising and tutoring and professional recognition⁶⁵.

⁶⁵ <https://www.ukat.uk/standards/professional-framework-for-advising-and-tutoring/>

Beyond the UK, NACADA has contributed a wealth of research material from US Universities and are also involved with international collaborative projects in the area of academic advising.

In taking this research further, it would be useful to review in detail, the various models and resourcing of pastoral support across the UK and student uptake of the support. On another, more cynical point, is whether HEI's are perhaps intentionally keeping support provision low key to avoid overwhelming staff and being unable to meet the commitments made to students at their universities. This research, which was fairly unique at the time of implementation, undertook to analyse and evaluate the support from the student's perspective and make an attempt to link effectiveness to the actual support provided. The research data collected for this thesis has the potential through publication and dissemination through journal papers and conferences such as UKAT, to provide another view of personal tutoring and pastoral support, that is, from the student's perspective. It can also raise issues about support frameworks within the HEI, incorporating personal tutoring as part of the curriculum design and personal development planning as well as the importance of monitoring student feedback in this area. These will in turn, advance the profile of this personal support area within universities nationally.

6.5 Key Recommendations

There are a number of key recommendations that have come from this research and are supported from others research in this area (e.g. Grey and Osbourne 2018). However, this study also highlights potential problems in meeting these recommendations. It is important to consider at this point that the research results from this study are from two unique universities so forming general recommendations, needs to be regarded with some circumspection.

1. All universities need to have a clear framework within their curriculum structure and timetabling, which includes active personal tutoring and pastoral support, both at a peer group level and individual one to one sessions. During interviews with staff at Keele, it was mentioned that the nature of the student population in universities is changing and

universities therefore need to continually monitor and assess demand and student perception of the service and act accordingly.

2. Personal tutoring and pastoral support , however it is delivered, needs to be consistent in both experience for the student and the opportunity for access across the whole university and well as having a holistic approach to addressing student's personal needs. It may be useful to consider involvement of students as Student Mentors or implementing a Buddy System which some universities (e.g., Sheffield Hallam University) currently manage very successfully as a means for additional peer support. Special attention needs to be focussed on students at risk and include a clear policy on the specialised support needed for international students coming to UK universities.
3. Neither university in this research has any Central Database System, Learning Analytics or Dashboard system to record student referrals or engagement with support. It is imperative to have all student information, including attendance, module marks, progression, meetings, support etc. in one place. This information, combined with personal information such as SpLD, disclosed by the student with permission to selected staff, could flag up at an early stage, any student concerns; academic or personal. It is important to ensure that any digital system used is secure and complies with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and is fully integrated into the university network for access both on and off site.
4. Formal training and structured mentoring by experienced staff are essential for effective Personal tutoring to take place. Neither university in this research has any mandatory training, although awareness workshops are offered to staff as part of CPD.
5. It is essential that staff allocated as personal tutors, who act as facilitators both want and can do the role. Busy staff unwilling or unable to support students should not be coerced into the role, but consideration of time on staff workloads and additional payment for taking the responsibility may be more appropriate. It is important to have in place as part of the University policy and framework, senior staff with the responsibility of checking and

monitoring personal tutors/course tutor's effectiveness. Also, full accountability is critical if the support system is to be a success for students.

There appears to be many models of personal tutoring and pastoral care delivery across UK universities and the model or framework used depends on the nature of the university and the staff delivering the support. Some universities now have independent support advisors (trained staff employed to specifically undertake the role) who act as personal tutors and academic staff have therefore nothing to do with supporting students personally. However, as discussed earlier and supported by the student and staff comments in this research, there is close synergy between academic and personal issues. As a first point of contact or facilitator, these issues may best be served by academic staff who can give the students confidence that they are coping academically, as well as mentoring the student to becoming independent and more resilient in their personal lives. The NUS Charter on Personal Tutoring and the three themes proposed by Grey and Osbourne (2018) of **process**, **operation** and **delivery** and the responsibilities and expectations of Personal Tutors are important considerations in developing effective support models. Greater emphasis on personal tutoring in the NSS survey, would also raise the support profile where effective student support is now taking place in universities and allow dissemination of good practice. It is also important to note that universities like Keele, that have a very proactive SU in terms of additional support and advice for students, provide a complementary service for the students, which appears to work well and is advertised widely. For many students, the initial contact with their assigned personal tutor is critical for them to effectively access further support services, both academic and pastoral.

6.6 Summary

With increasing demands on universities to provide a good quality educational experience with high graduate employment, Institutions are now very mindful of retention and success in the student population as well as their public image. In opening the opportunities for more students to go to university, widening participation has raised many issues for universities, not just in providing a

wider, more blended academic delivery but also personal support. Increased mental health issues amongst the student population is well documented, and it is clear that all universities need to ensure they can provide and resource an effective and efficient support system.

What appears to be critical from this study is that within any HEI, there is a consistency of provision, irrespective of the department or school a student is in. If every university has a clear policy and framework for personal tutoring and pastoral care delivery, this would help ensure equity of provision and a clear access route to effective support.

This research study asserts that more should be done within UK universities to evaluate student's feedback on personal support and that the role of effective personal tutors and pastoral support staff are formally recognised and rewarded within the university.

Addendum:

In March 2020, the global virus Covid 19 pandemic caused the closure of all educational institutions and effective lockdown and home isolation for all people in the UK.

This current ongoing period is now one of uncertainty and anxiety for many staff and students and is particularly difficult for students returning home to challenging home environments and relationships. Many International students have also found themselves unable to return home or have returned home and have found it difficult to engage with their studies due to access to technology and/or different time zones to attend to online tutorial meetings. Concerns regarding financial uncertainty, political turmoil, the value of higher education and future employment are all issues raised by students in isolation. The social distancing regulations, being separated from supportive peer group networks, being unable to engage with sporting activities and social events, combined with the fear of being exposed to the virus and concerns for vulnerable family members, create a great deal of anxiety and stress. Since the UK lockdown, the researcher for this thesis has attended several webinars and conferences by both NACADA globally and UKAT within the UK, with

support advice for tutors trying to help students remotely through emails, phone calls and online meetings through MS teams, Zoom, Facetime etc. Many students seem to engage well, whilst others find the system too detached. It is also difficult to read meaning and body language without personally seeing the student face to face.

Both staff and students have had to adapt to the changes fast, with alterations to exam assessments and disappointments for cancelled graduation events. This is a time of change and it will be interesting to see if remote specialist counselling support will be more widely available for the students that need the additional help over the coming months.

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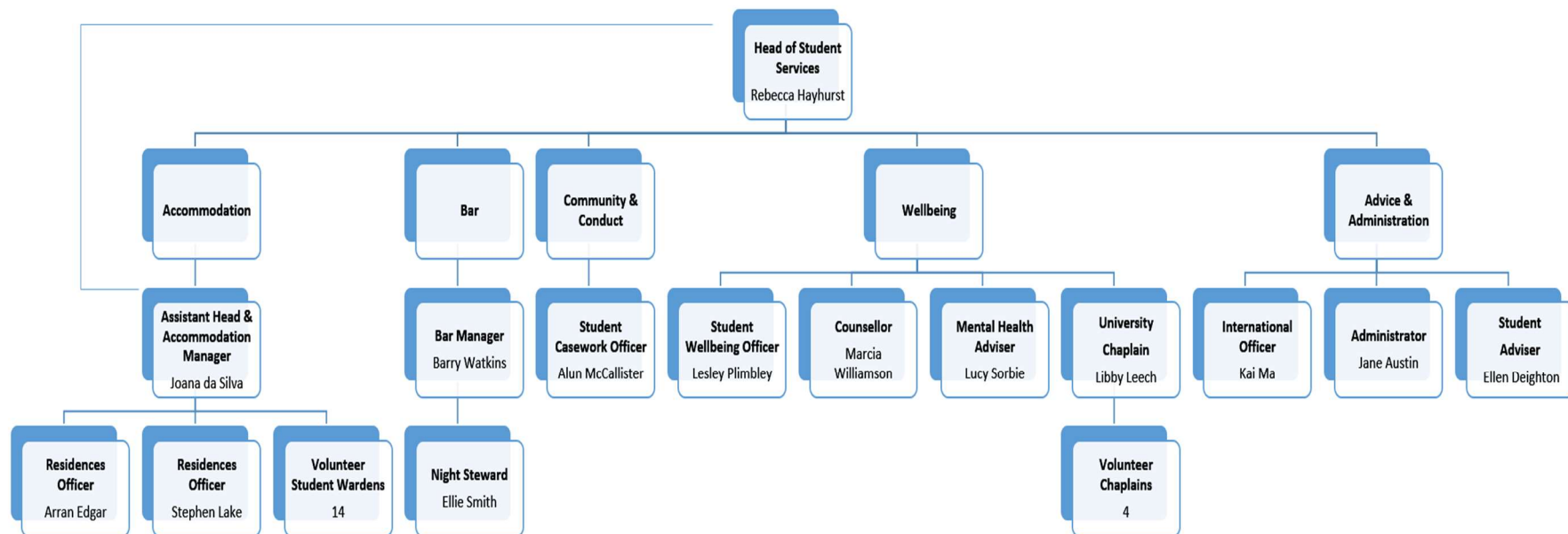
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Appendices

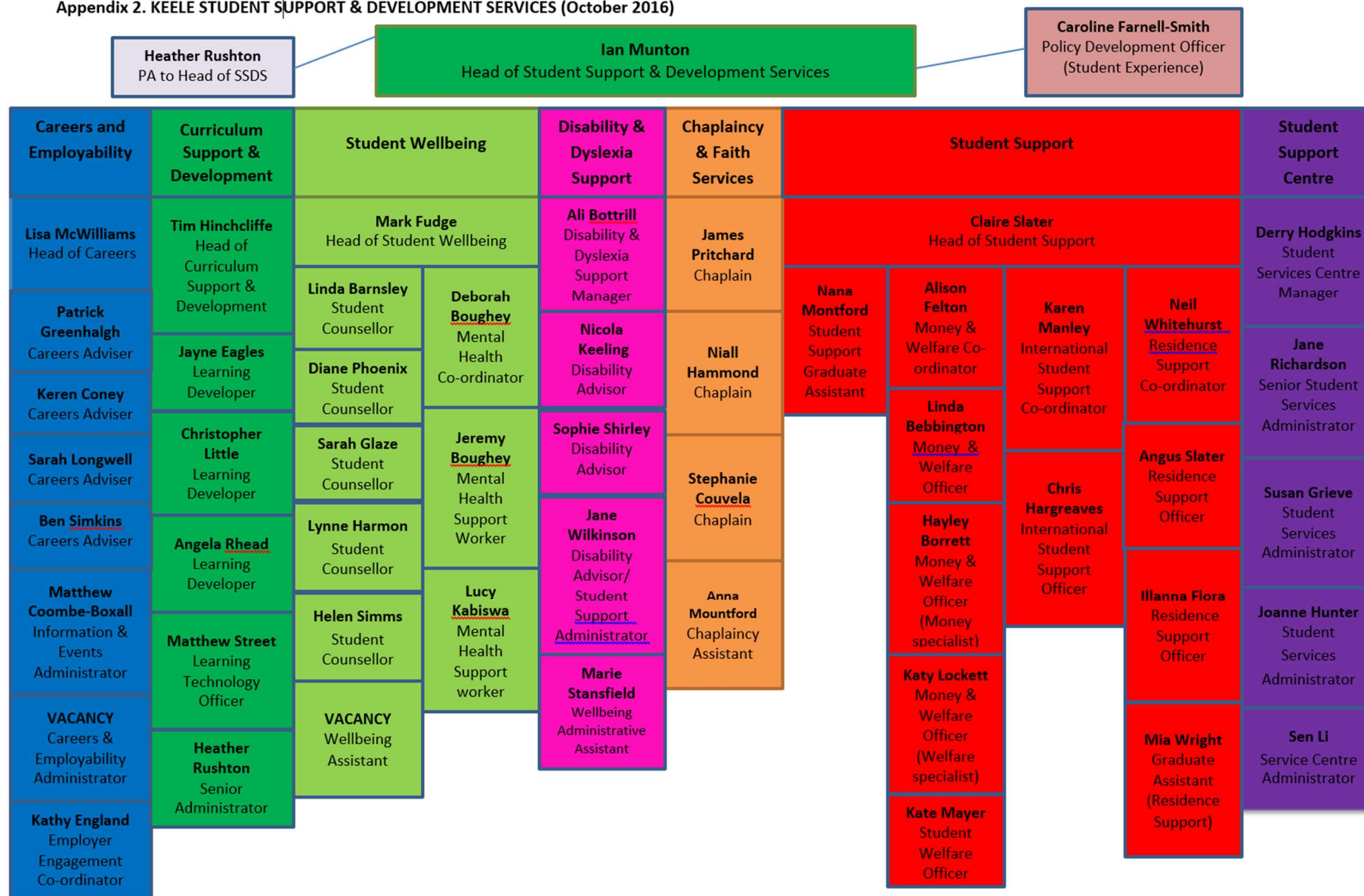
Appendix 1. Harper Adams Student Services Structure 2018/19



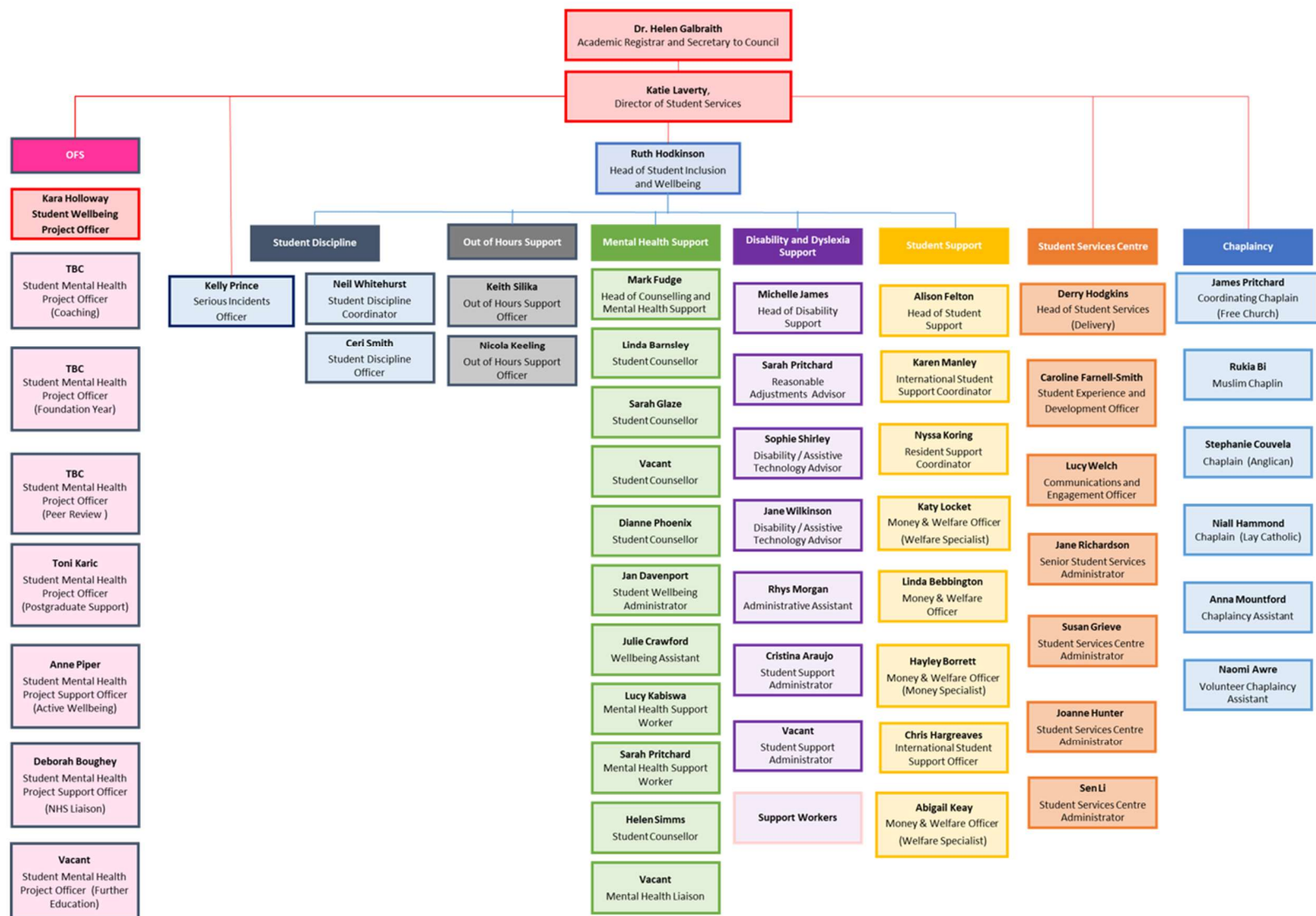
Additional part-time roles with Harper & Keele Vet School development:

- Accommodation Assistant (under JdS) – for September 2020
- Student Support Officer (under Wellbeing) – for September 2020
- Occupational Therapist or similar (under Wellbeing) – for March 2021

Appendix 2. KEELE STUDENT SUPPORT & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES (October 2016)



Appendix 3. Keele Staff Structure March 2020



Appendix 4 Questions for the online survey: formatted using Bristol Online software (revised following the pilot)

Question	Response type
1. What is your age?	<div>free text</div>
2. What is your gender?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Male Female
3 What year of your studies are you in?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 2 3 4 Postgraduate
4. When you have a problem at University, who would you go to for help?	<div>free text</div>
5. Does your University provide support beyond academic and learner support? <i>Please tick any you are aware of</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disability support Students Services/Accommodation Mental health counsellor Financial Guidance Guidance counsellor Allocated academic staff Other <div>Free text</div>
6. Are you allocated a named member of staff who is available to support you if you have any problems? (e.g. personal tutor, senior tutor, mentor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes No Do not know
7. Have you ever used personal or pastoral support services provided by your University? This includes senior tutor, student services and also the support services provided within the University e.g. counsellors etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes - I have used them a lot Yes - I have used them a little No - I have not used them at all No - I have received help and support elsewhere
8. If you answered Yes to the last question and have experienced using these services, how useful did you find this support and advice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very useful Somewhat useful Not useful <div>Please give an example here</div>
9. Would you use the service again if needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes Maybe No

<p>10. If you have used support from elsewhere, please indicate the source e.g. family, private counsellor, GP etc.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; min-height: 30px;">free text</div>
<p>11. Are you clear about the difference in the personal and academic support provided by your University? Do you think they are in anyway linked? – please give any examples you can think of</p>	<div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="margin-right: 20px;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes Maybe No </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; min-height: 30px;">free text</div> </div>
<p>12. Do you think there is a demand for any other types of support in your University which would help students? Please explain below</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; min-height: 30px;">free text</div>
<p>If you would be willing to take part in a small focus group of 5 - 8 people please leave your student email here:</p> <p>If you would be willing to take part in a private interview with me please leave your student email here:</p> <p><u>Please note: all contributions to this research will be anonymous. No individual student names will be disclosed in this research.</u></p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; min-height: 30px; margin-bottom: 10px;">free text</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; min-height: 30px;">free text</div>

Many thanks for taking the time to complete the survey and help this research.

Nicky Hunter

Date:

Appendix 5. Online survey questions, introductory page and student information sheet

Introductory page (this is on the front page of the email)

Invitation to students taking part in the online survey

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the range and use of personal/pastoral support in Universities. The purpose of this study is to establish whether the support services provided are meeting the needs of students currently in Higher Education and supporting them through their studies.

If you decide to participate, please complete the following survey. Your completion of this survey indicates your consent to participate in this research study. The survey will only take a few minutes to complete and is completely anonymous. The survey will close in 4 weeks [date] but I would please encourage you to complete this as soon as possible.

The survey is designed to find out your views on the personal support provided, whether you have used them or not. The results from this research will help inform Universities on the significance of pastoral support provision in allowing students to succeed and complete their studies.

If you require more information about this research and your involvement, please follow the link here ([hyperlink here to Keele student information sheet IS1](#))

If you need any further information on this research, please do not hesitate to contact me
n.hunter@keele.ac.uk

Many thanks for agreeing to take part in this research

Nicky Hunter (researcher)

Here is the link for the survey I would like you to complete

[Link here to online survey](#)



Information Sheet: Students at HAU

Study Title:

Pastoral Support in Higher Education: A Survey of University Provision and Students Views of its Effectiveness.

Aims of the Research

The aim of this research is to evaluate the of range pastoral support provided by Universities and to ascertain its value and use by students at all levels in their study programmes.

This research is part of a study for an Educational Doctorate at Keele University.

Invitation

You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study 'Pastoral Support in Higher Education'. This project is being undertaken by Nicky Hunter: Doctoral Research student at Keele University.

The researcher has been granted permission by your Institution: Harper Adams University Courses for you to be invited to take part in this research.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Why have I been chosen?

All students within a specific course area at all levels have been invited to apply to complete this survey. This is to ensure I get a random selection of students with wide range of experience of pastoral support.

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. However, this survey is completely anonymous so no students can be identified. You are free to withdraw at any time during the research process without giving a reason and doing so will have no consequences or implications.

Will my information be retained and is confidentiality assured?

The survey data will be recorded anonymously. The only personal information I will retain from this survey is your course, year and gender and there should be no concerns regarding disclosure of information in the research.

Only Nicky Hunter and the associated Research Supervisor (Dr Jonathan Parker) will have direct access to the survey results. Anonymous, collated data may be directly referred to in published papers resulting from this study after completion. All data and narratives from interviews from the research will be kept in a secure, encrypted data base and kept for a period of at least five years.

I do however have to work within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law. For example, in circumstances whereby I am made aware of future criminal activity, abuse either to yourself or another (i.e. child or sexual abuse) or suicidal tendencies I must pass this information to the relevant authorities.

If you have any concerns, please email me at: nhunter@keele.ac.uk

What will happen if I take part and what do I have to do?

You will be asked to complete a short on-line survey undertaken in your own time. After students have completed the survey, the data will be collated and analysed.

Focus groups and interviews.

You will be asked on the online survey if you would like to volunteer to take part in a small focus group of 5 - 8 students to discuss your experiences of personal support. I would also like to interview a small number of students on a one to one basis to get some more detailed personal views of support whether good or not. All discussions that take place in the focus groups will remain confidential and all students taking part in these group discussions would be required to agree to this on the signed consent form (copy will be made available to you in advance of the meeting).

I fully appreciate that some students would not like to disclose their personal issues to a focus group, so like the focus group, your personal interview will be anonymous and you will not be named in the research. I would very much like to hear of personal experiences from you. Interviews will take place in teaching rooms on campus and you will be notified where and when the focus groups and interviews will take place (this will be after the closure of the online survey).

Please note: If you wish to withdraw at any time before the research is complete, all your data and information from the interviews and the focus groups will be securely destroyed.

What are the benefits of taking part?

This research is based on students giving their opinions of their awareness and use of their Universities pastoral support network. This research is aimed at showing the variety of support provided with Universities and the value to students in supporting them with their academic studies and personal development whilst at University. This research will help inform all Universities and identify good examples of practice and where students may need additional support.

What are the risks of taking part?

There are no identified risks of taking part in this study as all the information collected from the surveys and interviews remains anonymous and you will not be identified in any way.

If this survey and research raises personal issues for you that you consider may need some additional support or advice, please contact your Senior Tutor or Student Services at Harper Adams University.

What if there is a problem?

If you become unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study you may wish to speak to the researcher Nicky Hunter who will do her best to answer your questions and deal with any problems. You should contact Nicky Hunter by email in the first instance: n.hunter@keele.ac.uk or Dr Jonathan Parker (Research Supervisor) j.parker@keele.ac.uk.

Otherwise write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

Nicola Leighton

Research Governance Officer

Research & Enterprise Services

Dorothy Hodgkin Building

Keele University

ST5 5BG

E-mail: n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk

Tel: 01782 733306

Many thanks for taking the time to read this information and for agreeing to take part in the survey which I hope will in future inform and further support University personal and pastoral care nationally.

Nicky Hunter

n.hunter@keele.ac.uk.

CONSENT FORM (Focus Groups)

Title of Project:

Pastoral Support in Higher Education: A Survey of University Provision and Students Views of its Effectiveness

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: Mrs Nicky Hunter: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Keele University. Email n.hunter@keele.ac.uk

Please note: If you wish to withdraw at any time before the research is complete, all your data and information from interviews and the focus groups will be securely destroyed.

Please initial the box if you agree with the statement

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated February 2016: **Information Sheet for Students at HAU** for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time ☐
3. I agree to take part in this study. ☐
4. I agree to keep Focus Groups conversations confidential. ☐
5. I agree to allow the dataset collected to be used for future research projects ☐
6. I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research project ☐

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

CONSENT FORM (Focus Groups) (for the use of quotes)

Title of Project: Pastoral Support in Higher Education: A Survey of University Provision and Students Views of its Effectiveness

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: Mrs Nicky Hunter: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Keele University. Email n.hunter@keele.ac.uk

Please note: If you wish to withdraw at any time before the research is complete, all your data and information from interviews and the focus groups will be securely destroyed.

Please initial the box if you agree with the statement

1. I agree for my quotes to be used ☐
2. I do not agree for my quotes to be used ☐

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix 7. Outline Questions for the Focus Groups

Prior to the focus groups and interviews, students will be sent the information sheet about the research and the statement on it below will be reiterated at the start of the session

I do have to work within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law. For example, in circumstances whereby I am made aware of future criminal activity, abuse either to yourself or another (i.e. child or sexual abuse) or suicidal tendencies I must pass this information to the relevant authorities.

Outline questions for the focus groups (30 min duration)

- 1) What academic and pastoral services are provided to support you?
- 2) How do you know about them?
- 3) Have you or any of your friends used these services and why?
- 4) How have you found them? - easy to access, staff availability, staff expertise, follow up visits etc.
- 5) Have you sought support elsewhere and why?
- 6) Have you any ideas of other services that you think would help you or other students? e.g. buddy system.
- 7) How important do you think it is that your University provides these services and why?
- 8) Are you aware of students leaving University due to not engaging in the support offered or it not being available when they needed it?
- 9) Are there any issues about who provides the support e.g. confidence in staff, confidentiality etc?
- 10) Do you consider there is a link between students having academic and pastoral problems at University - explain how?
- 11) Can you suggest any changes that your University could make to supporting students better?

Appendix 8. Outline Questions for Student Interviews

Prior to the focus groups and interviews, students will be sent the information sheet about the research and the statement on it below will be reiterated at the start of the session

I do have to work within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law. For example, in circumstances whereby I am made aware of future criminal activity, abuse either to yourself or another (i.e. child or sexual abuse) or suicidal tendencies I must pass this information to the relevant authorities.

Outline questions for interviews (30 min duration)

- 1) Tell me about yourself
- 2) What academic and pastoral services are provided to support you?
- 3) How do you know about them?
- 4) Have you or any of your friends used these services and why?
- 5) How have you found them? - easy to access, staff availability, staff expertise, follow up visits etc.
- 6) Have you sought support elsewhere and why?
- 7) Have you any ideas of other services that you think would help you or other students? e.g. buddy system.
- 8) Are students realistic about the level of support HE can provide?
- 9) How important do you think it is that your University provides these services and why?
- 10) Are you aware of students leaving University due to not engaging in the support offered or it not being available when they needed it?
- 11) Are there any issues about who provides the support e.g. confidence in staff, confidentiality etc?
- 12) Scenario Family bereavement/health problems – who do you see?
- 13) Do you consider there is a link between students having academic and pastoral problems at University - explain how?
- 14) Can you suggest any changes that your University could make to supporting students better?

Can you tell me more/give an example?



CONSENT FORM (Interviews Keele: Students)

Title of Project:

Pastoral Support in Higher Education: A Survey of University Provision and Students Views of its Effectiveness

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: Mrs Nicky Hunter: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Keele University. Email n.hunter@keele.ac.uk

Please note: If you wish to withdraw at any time before the research is complete, all your data and information from interviews and the focus groups will be securely destroyed.

Please initial the box if you agree with the statement

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated February 2016: **Information Sheet for Students at Keele** for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time ☐
3. I agree to take part in this study. ☐
4. I agree to allow the dataset collected to be used for future research projects ☐
5. I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research project ☐

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

CONSENT FORM: Interviews (for the use of quotes)

Title of Project: Pastoral Support in Higher Education: A Survey of University Provision and Students Views of its Effectiveness

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: Mrs Nicky Hunter: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Keele University. Email n.hunter@keele.ac.uk

Please note: If you wish to withdraw at any time before the research is complete, all your data and information from interviews and the focus groups will be securely destroyed.

Please initial box if you agree with the statement

1. I agree for my quotes to be used ☐

2. I do not agree for my quotes to be used ☐

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

Staff Information Sheet (ref IS2)

Study Title:

Pastoral Support in Higher Education: **A Survey of University Provision and Students Views of its Effe**

Aims of the Research

The aim of this research is to evaluate the of range pastoral support provided by Universities and to ascertain its value and use by students at all levels in their study programmes.

This research is part of a study for an Educational Doctorate at Keele University.

Invitation

You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study 'Pastoral Support in Higher Education'. The researcher has been granted permission by your University (Keele University) for you to be invited to take part in this research.

Why have I been chosen?

As part of my research I will need to interview some key staff like you who are providing pastoral and specialist support within your University. This may be staff employed to undertake this role or some staff who undertake this role as part of teaching or an additional responsibility within the University. The staff selected have been identified in providing and/or managing pastoral support for the course specific students in the target online survey which has been sent to all students in (course area).

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. However, this survey is anonymous so no staff will be identified by name.

What will happen if I take part and what do I have to do?

If you are selected, you will be asked to take part in a short one to one interview to determine your role in supporting students and to discuss uptake and use etc. within your University. No individual staff will be identified by name in the interview transcripts but it will be important to see if you feel your service could be better used, extended or made more aware to the students.

As part of my research I will need to interview some key staff like you who are providing pastoral and specialist support within your University. This may be staff employed to undertake this role or some staff who undertake this role as part of teaching or an additional responsibility within the University.

Please could you email me at n.hunter@keele.ac.uk to indicate your interest in taking part in a short interview so that I can get your views? Copies of the consent forms are attached to this email but paper copies will be provided for you to sign when I see you for the interview.

Interviews will take place in private meeting rooms on campus and I will email you to arrange a suitable time to suit you.

What if there is a problem?

If you become unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study you may wish to speak to the researcher Nicky Hunter who will do her best to answer your questions and deal with any problems. You should contact Nicky Hunter by email in the first instance: n.hunter@keele.ac.uk or Dr Jonathan Parker (Research Supervisor) j.parker@keele.ac.uk

Otherwise write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

Nicola Leighton

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Dorothy Hodgkin Building

Keele University

ST5 5BG

E-mail: n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk

Tel: 01782 733306

Many thanks for taking the time to read this information and for agreeing to take part in this research which I hope will in future inform and further support University personal and pastoral care nationally.

Nicky Hunter

n.hunter@keele.ac.uk.

Attachments: Consent for research and use of quote forms (V4 January 2016)

Appendix 11. Outline questions for the staff interviews (30 min duration) Keele.

1. What is your role/responsibility within student pastoral care? Tell me about yourself
2. Is this separate from academic support?
3. Explain how your role works in supporting students (e.g. general **facilitator** or specialist support e.g. mental health care etc.)
4. How do the students access your support i.e. What is the main mechanism of students approaching you for advice /support and do you have some sort of referral system from other staff? Explain
5. If you are not a specialist provider for care e.g. mental health – have you been able to access CPD to assist you in your role supporting students? Please explain
6. What are your views on supporting students at University?
7. Does the issue the students approach you with affect their studies? Do you liaise with academic staff if impacting on their studies? How is it taken further?
8. Are you allocated time for your role in supporting students and for example are there periods during the week when student can access your support? Out of hours?
9. Is there any HEI policy you are aware of on supporting students and reporting vulnerable students for specialist support?
10. How do you feel the service works at Keele – is there a better way – are services stretched?
11. How do you get any feedback on support?
12. Anything else you would like to add?



CONSENT FORM (Interviews staff)

Title of Project:

Pastoral Support in Higher Education: A Survey of University Provision and Students Views of its Effectiveness

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: Mrs Nicky Hunter: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Keele University. Email n.hunter@keele.ac.uk

Please note: If you wish to withdraw at any time before the research is complete, all your data and information from the interviews will be securely destroyed.

Please initial box if you agree with the statement

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated February 2016: Information Sheet for Staff at HAU for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I agree to take part in this study. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to allow the dataset collected to be used for future research projects | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research project | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

CONSENT FORM (Interviews)

(for the use of quotes)

Title of Project: Pastoral Support in Higher Education: A Survey of University Provision and Students Views of its Effectiveness

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: Mrs Nicky Hunter: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Keele University. Email n.hunter@keele.ac.uk

Please note: If you wish to withdraw at any time before the research is complete, all your data and information from interviews and the focus groups will be securely destroyed.

Please initial the box if you agree with the statement

1. I agree for my quotes to be used

☐

2. I do not agree for my quotes to be used

☐

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix 13. Ethics Approval Letter 1



Ref: ERP1261

10th February 2016

Nicky Hunter
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Keele University

Dear Nicky

Re: Pastoral Support in Higher Education: A survey of University Provision and Students Views of its Effectiveness (working title)

Thank you for submitting your revised application for review.

I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved by the Ethics Review Panel. The following documents have been reviewed and approved by the panel as follows:

Document(s)	Version Number	Date
Summary Document	4	January 2016
HEI Invitation Letter	3	January 2016
Student Information Sheet (IS1)	4	24 th January 2016
Staff Information Sheet (IS2)	3	24 th January 2016
OS Introduction Page and Online Consent Combined	3	December 2015
Questions for online survey	2	October 2015
Outline Questions for the Focus Group and Interviews	2	October 2015
Consent Form and Consent Form for the use of quotes (Interviews)	4	January 2016
Consent Form and Consent Form for the use of quotes (Focus Groups)	4	January 2016
Debrief Invitation	2	January 2016

However, the panel recommend that you address the following points and send the amended documents to the ERP administrator at uso.erps@keele.ac.uk for our records.

Directorate of Engagement & Partnerships
T: +44(0)1782 734467

Keele University, Staffordshire ST5 5BG, UK
www.keele.ac.uk +44 (0)1782 732000

1) Please go through the finished documents and address the typographical errors and word omissions remaining in the documents.

2) Please review the new IS1. Under, '**Do I have to take part?**', it states, '*You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. However, this survey is completely anonymous so no students can **or will** be identified.*' Text in red can be deleted – it's inclusion only raises Questions

3) Please review the new IS2. Given inclusion of same earlier, it is unnecessary to include, '*Please note: You are free withdraw at any time during the research process without giving a reason and doing so will have no consequences or implications*', so this statement can be deleted.

4) It is recommended that whenever possible, the de-brief is offered at the end of the last meeting between the participant and the researcher, rather than via a separate email, etc.

If the fieldwork goes beyond the date stated in your application (31st August 2016), you must notify the Ethical Review Panel via the ERP administrator at uso.erps@keele.ac.uk stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail.

If there are any other amendments to your study you must submit an 'application to amend study' form to the ERP administrator stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail. This form is available via <http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/>.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via the ERP administrator on uso.erps@keele.ac.uk stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail.

Regards

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C H Bonnerman' with 'pp' written below it.

Dr Andrew Rutherford
Vice Chair – Ethical Review Panel

CC RI Manager
 Supervisor

Appendix 14. Ethics Approval Letter 2



Ref: ERP1272

8th September 2016

Nicky Hunter
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Keele University

Dear Nicky

Re: Pastoral Support in Higher Education: A survey of University Provision and Students Views of its Effectiveness (working title)

Thank you for submitting your application to amend study, informing us that more time is required to complete the study and the end date for fieldwork has now been extended to the 31st December 2016. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved by the Ethical Review Panel.

Just to remind you, if the fieldwork goes beyond the 31st December 2016, or there are any other amendments to your study you must submit an 'application to amend study' form to the ERP administrator at research.erps@keele.ac.uk stating **ERP1** in the subject line of the e-mail. This form is available via <http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/>

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via the ERP administrator research.erps@keele.ac.uk stating **ERP1** in the subject line of the e-mail.

Regards

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A Rutherford', with the initials 'PP' written below it.

Dr Andrew Rutherford
Vice Chair – Ethical Review Panel

CC RI Manager
 Supervisor

Directorate of Engagement & Partnerships
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