Student Support Implementation Update
School of Informatics

Staff planning (timescale / outcome of appointing Senior Tutor, Personal Tutors, SSOs or other Teaching Organisation restructuring).

Informatics will appoint PTs as part of the allocation of duties process, likely to be resolved by early May 2012. The Senior PT has already been identified as Paul Jackson. There won’t be any SSO appointment within Informatics, although subtle changes are already being made to the availability of our Student Services support staff, in accordance with the PT guidelines. We would welcome additional advice on the agreed CSE role definition for PT’s, although do intend to have training in place prior to week 0 of 2012/13.

Note that the School continues to look into ways of strengthening the relationship between course tutors and PTs; via improved engagement with IAD, an improved training programme for course tutors and a review of the existing INFBase student support facility providing course-related drop-in support for students.

Implementation details of tutor / tutee meetings (thoughts on when meetings should ideally take place for each year group and what sorts of activities will be undertaken).

We’re keen that all PTs should ensure that the first individual meeting of each academic year with their tutee takes place in Week 0, or certainly before the end of Week 1 of Semester 1. In particular, this will help with the start of session course selection process. Other individual meetings will be recommended during Sem 1, whilst we are currently investigating the requirement of an individual meeting at the start of Sem 2, with the specific focus of looking at Semester 1 grades.

The function of the group meeting remains unclear, current interpretation leads us to consider the group meetings to be a more informal type of event, possibly hosted through our INFBase student support network, or used to build a "community of learners" with the PT playing a facilitator role allowing all their tutees to meet across years and programmes in an informal setting, for example a coffee shop or bar. This concept has the potential to grow nicely into a "mentor" or "academic family" network.

A tutoring statement - what will the PT / tutee meetings involve within a School (a statement, perhaps of what students can, and cannot, reasonably expect).

These individual meetings provide students with an opportunity to discuss all aspects of their academic programme with their PT. At the start of each session PTs are encouraged to review the previous session’s performance, and assist with course selection based on previous performance, known problem areas, resit results and known exit routes. Subsequent meetings will discuss on-going course matters, reviewing course performance and helping to better engage students with their course tutors as/when necessary. Students will also have an open invitation to contact their PT to report or discuss any personal issues that they believe are (or might in future) affect their academic performance, on the basis that the PT can provide academic advice, point the student in the right direction and represent the student at SCC and BoE meetings where necessary. We are discussing internally and with CSE how we might incorporate additional support activities that go beyond those provided by the current DoS system. We welcome further advice on this. For example, links to the materials associated with the recent Benchmarking event and, more generally, pointers to model practices around the country.
Any risks and issues you foresee for the School.

The School is aware that the availability of PTs might become an issue, although expect that to form part of any training information provided prior to the start of 2012/13. Response times to meeting requests or email questions is also something that we would like to improve. As a backup, we already ensure that students know they can always contact the Informatics Student Services (ISS) admin team who will pursue the PT on their behalf. A clear statement of responsibilities should manage expectations on all sides, but should also include guidance on what to do when standards fall short. ISS can play a role as the central hub to field and redirect issues; for example a student coming to the ISS when their PT has not responded or a PT/ course tutor (or others) contacting ISS when the student has not responded.

It has become clear that the University considers the PT role to be more involved, therefore more time consuming, that the previous DoS role. Informatics are interested to hear more about any additional resources that the University intends to make available as part of the roll-out of PTs. Or is this supposed to be resource neutral, meaning Schools need to consider reducing effort elsewhere?

There are also risks associated with expectation – this should be managed, making sure that students known that we are entering the first year of at least a three phase activity.

A communication plan for new and continuing students (this should include details of updating print and web material as appropriate).

This is still being discussed; we plan to provide full documentation online, via email and in our student laboratories as quickly as we can. However, the School is aware that any premature publication of information could be misleading, particularly given the CSE confusion about some aspects of the PT role and expectations.

An overview of who does what / will do what in regards to student support in the Teaching Organisations (this is particularly important as not all Schools are following the SSO-as-a-person model as in CHSS).

We’re looking into a way of mapping all of the PT, SSO and associated responsibilities onto our existing structure, importantly in a way that can be made available to students so that they too can understand the impact of the new structure and how this changes the way we operate.

Neil McGillivray
18th April 2012