INTRODUCTION
This proposal sets out the School of Engineering’s approach to the deployment of additional administrative support (funding of the equivalent of two full-time Grade 5 staff) to aid the academic and pastoral support of its students, in light of the proposed introduction of the new Personal Tutor system across the University.

CURRENT SITUATION IN ENGINEERING
The School of Engineering currently operates its own teaching databases which record student attendance (at tutorials and laboratories in predominantly non-Honours years), coursework submissions and marks, and the marks required for presentation at Boards of Examiners. Currently, due to existing workloads, a limited amount of use is made of this very rich data from the student support perspective. Currently, Directors of Studies do not have access to this attendance, submission and course performance data.

In recent years, the School has run an initiative for first year students entitled “Manage My Learning” (MML). In MML, students completed a form which required them to reflect on their progress at University in areas such as how they were settling-in in general, private study practices, lecture and general attendance, time management and how they had, and planned to, develop. This form was then submitted to WebCT to facilitate a meeting, either one-to-one or in a group with fellow first-year directees, with their Director of Studies at least once each semester. Although not excluded from discussion, particularly in one-to-one meetings, academic performance to date was not covered in the form. Full participation by both Directors of Studies and students was variable, although those students who participated stated they had found the process beneficial and that it had given some structure to their meetings with their Director of Studies.

PROPOSAL FOR ENGINEERING
The School’s proposal is to use these two new posts to improve and expand current practices, as well as to introduce new practices and procedures. It is anticipated that the roles will develop over the coming years as new IT systems are developed to enhance the use of the data currently gathered. This may be in the form of a new School teaching database, or developments at a College or University level. Carrying out improved, and more frequent, analysis of the current data will enable early identification of students starting to disengage from their studies. This could be through non-attendance at monitored activities or through the non-submission of assignments. Directors of Studies could then be alerted to any deterioration in a student’s engagement and invite them to meet to discuss their current progress on their degree programme. In the next academic year (12/13) additional information on student engagement will also be available from the successor to WebCT (Learn 9) to help monitor student commitment to their studies.

The School would like to introduce an enhanced MML scheme to support the guidelines for the Personal Tutor system’s minimum requirements concerning the number of face-to-face meetings each year between Personal Tutors and their tutees. Initially, the Student Support Administrators would be able to provide Personal Tutors with a record of the attendance, submission and performance record to date in the academic year, of their tutees to facilitate a more productive discussion on their progress at university. Further enhancement by supplying copies of marked electronic submissions is also being considered.

Many current Directors of Studies express concerns about their ability to deal with students suffering from emotional problems, many arising from severe stress. Students in distress, for a variety of reasons, also appear at the desk of the Engineering Teaching Organisation (ETO) as it is a very familiar point of contact with the School administrative structure for Engineering students. Staff in the ETO also feel unqualified to deal with students arriving at the public counter in an emotional state. It is planned that at least one of the Student Support Administrators will be trained to deal with distressed students as an initial point of contact. Such support would enable existing staff across the whole School to have a source of expertise to rely on to deal with such matters.

These aspects of dealing with students who have concerns about their personal life impacting upon their studies, could also be expanded to the administration of the Special Circumstances system within the School.
This could range from administrative support for the Personal Tutors and the Boards of Examiners, to completely devolving the whole Special Circumstances process from the Personal Tutors, and the ETO, to the Student Support Administrators.

SUMMARY
The School currently has existing systems which generate a substantial amount of very rich data which could be used more effectively to help monitor student engagement in their studies, particularly in the first two years of study when students are more likely to disengage for a wide variety of reasons. This information, combined with the enhancement of existing practices (MML), could contribute to better informed and more meaningful fact-to-face meeting between students and their Personal Tutors.

The introduction of two Student Support Administrators could facilitate the introduction of such developments in the next academic year, enhancing both the academic and pastoral support of students. It is anticipated that the roles of these two posts will develop as improved IT systems are introduced at a School and University level.

These changes do not address the other major issue in the current Director of Studies system, namely how to ensure the complete engagement of all those members of academic staff who act in the academic and pastoral support of students, irrespective of the name of the role.

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Director of Teaching
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