Student Support, Student Support Officer and Personal Tutors (TNB 17/01/2012)

The Personal Tutor (PT) initiative is an opportunity for us to rethink Student Support and the following related issues.

- Providing Academic and Pastoral Support with PTs.
- Personal Development Planning (PDP) for students.
- Promoting a culture among UGs of full academic participation.
- Improved Induction.
- Using existing data (and generating more) to underpin an evidence-based approach to UG education.

Taken together, improvements in these will substantially enhance the student experience.

Academic time is a resource in short supply. To preserve it we envisage a three-tier system of student support:

- Personal Tutor (An academic member of staff)
- Student Support Officer SSO (Grade 7 with a good mathematics degree, a strong interest in the subject, and an interest in Education)
- MTO

Personal Tutor
The Personal Tutor would see UGs at the start of each semester for 20 minutes (30 minutes in Semester 1 of the Freshman and Junior Honours years). PTs would be responsible for ensuring students have a coherent academic programme and a strategy for improvement if they are underperforming. We expect PTs to lead on PPD for students in the Honours years. PTs would be expected to be available at other times, but the expectation would be that suitable issues would be dealt with by SSO or MTO.

We will continue with our current system where most staff are DoSs. Thus we will have around 30 PTs each taking around 20-25 students.

We hope to have the resources so that students have an additional group meeting with their PT or the SSO each Semester.

Student Support Officer
The SSO will have a portfolio of duties (see below) centred on student support. Their primary focus will be on Prehonours. They will see early years UGs in groups to discuss and promote PDP and be available as an alternative to the PT for issues requiring some subject knowledge.
They will coordinate a Rapid Response system which aims to set expectations of full participation of students. The Senior Tutor role is currently largely unspecified, but the SSO will be expected to provide some support. The SSO will be a figure known and recognised by and available to students.

**MTO**

MTO will continue to provide purely administrative support such as entering course choices (approved by SSO/PT) or handling routine administrative questions from students.

**Personal Development Planning**

We anticipate that there will be (by 2013-14 at least) an available, nimble, University-wide online system for recording student development and an e-portfolio system for students to record their development. These may be the same system. The recording session is essential to enable PTs, STs, SSO, etc to work effectively together.

We recognise the importance of PDP in the modern HE system, but it is a challenge for the School: how, for example, do we promote employability skills when many staff neither have these skills nor do they believe them to be important in HE? Students also need some instruction on the professional ethos: what it means to be a mathematician. This is something which we can assume academic staff do understand, but they may not reflect on it and they may not regard it as part of their duty to teach it other than by example.

We intend that the SSO will provide impetus by holding training sessions for early years UGs and training sessions for students (and perhaps also staff) in use of whatever system is chosen by the University. We will develop a programme and materials to promote PDP and the SSO will lead the programme in prehonours years.

In particular, the SSO will hold small group meetings with Prehonours UGs to discuss and promote PDP. In Honours years, we expect students to be in the habit of recording their achievements via an e-portfolio and the task of discussing progress and the students reflection will become a duty for the PT.

We will be looking also to IAD for advice and assistance with materials, as well as for less subject-specific materials, courses, etc.

**Participation**

Like many Schools, we collect data on attendance and hand-ins but act inconsistently on it, and when we do act the process is very slow. We intend to introduce for the 2012 cohort a system whereby we expect full participation. Students will be expected to email if they are not going to attend or hand in. Unannounced failures to participate (and repeated announced ones) will be acted on immediately by the SSO: once will generate a reminder, twice will lead to an interview with SSO and targets being set for future attendance. Cases that are not rapidly solved will be escalated to the PT.

Running this system will involve producing materials explaining it to the students, providing advice on appropriate University Services where there is some underlying problem, etc.
Improved Induction
There has been much attention given to the School-HE transition and the problems it poses. In Mathematics currently students are set loose on their UG careers on the basis of a booklet, an introductory talk and a chat with their DoS.

We will introduce a more supportive system such as “Manage My Learning” used by the School of Engineering. This will feature at least self-reflective questionnaires that can serve as a basis for discussions with the PT or SSO. We imagine a substantial portion of SSO group interviews in year 1 will be part of this process.

A scientific approach to education
We currently have access to large amounts of data on student qualifications, performance, etc. Pressure on time has meant we have made little use of this. There are any number of questions the answer to which could inform our student support, teaching generally, recruitment, etc.

The SSO will also be seeing students regularly, particularly those who may be struggling. We can use these meetings to gather further information (by “semi-structured interviews” or similar) on student attitudes and beliefs and how these contribute to success.

The SSO will be thus be expected to contribute as a “Research Assistant” to projects aimed at improving our teaching and support.

SSO Outline Job Description

Direct student support
- Deal with routine Special Circumstances issues with students (e.g. relatively brief illness in prehonours years) and collate all Special Circumstances paperwork.
- Be available on an “Office Hours” and “By Appointment” basis to provide help to students where some subject knowledge or good familiarity with University regulations is required.
- Meet Prehonours UGs in groups once a year.

Personal Development
- Train students (and staff) in the use of an e-portfolio system.
- Monitor e-portfolios of Prehonours students and encourage their use.
- Gather and maintain resources to aid students in PD.

Assist Senior Tutor
- The ST role is not yet clarified. The SSO could act as 2nd member of staff at FAP interviews and maintain FAP paperwork.
- Assist in training of PTs.

Rapid Reaction
• Implement a system whereby all student non-participation is actively challenged. This will involve contacting students, interviewing them, directing them to appropriate services, etc.
• If students do not meet set targets, meet with them and their PT to determine action and ensure that it is followed through.

Resources and information
• Develop and direct students to appropriate collections of material on subject-specific study skills and extra instructional material.

Statistical collection and analysis
• Maintain thorough records of student progression and analyse to consider issues such as previous qualifications, gender, degree programmes, etc.

Research Assistant
• Act as a “Research Assistant” on projects studying our education and research.

SSO Time Analysis
Assume a full time position for 30 term-time weeks and 16 vac-time weeks (assuming Annual leave is taken out of term). This comes to around 1050 term hours (of which about 400 are in each of the teaching semesters). The analysis assumes a cohort size of 165.

Group Interviews
• Suppose seeing students in a group of 4 takes 40 minutes and another 40 minutes is spent preparing (reading student records, etc) and documenting afterwards. Total time required is 55 hours to which we add 10 hours for overall organisation of this activity. Thus it takes 65 hours to see a year cohort once in groups. (50% of working time for 3-4 weeks).

Rapid Response System
The numbers here are to some extent speculative.

• Assume the following for Semester 1, Year 1 students:
  o Low level: 40% of the cohort need chasing once and 25% twice, 15% three times taking 10 minutes: 25 hours
  o Medium level: 20% of the cohort require interview to establish causes of issues and formulate plan. 30 times one hour (assuming 30 minute interview, including recording the incident): 33 hours.
  o High level: 15% of cohort require further interview, possibly involving also PT. 15x2hours: 33 hours.
  o Administering the system: 10 hours:
- **Total time required: 100 hours.** We expect this fairly uniformly distributed over 10 teaching weeks.
  - We hope that once expectations are established the amount of monitoring required will decrease:
    - Year 1 S2: **80 hours**
    - Year 2: **70 hours per semester**
  - On these figures, SSO would be involved in these activities for 180/170 hours S1/S2.

**Special Circumstances**
- Preparing of Special Circumstances claims: average time (to see student, complete paperwork, record results, etc) 45 minutes. Assume numbers are at 10% of the student body and that 80% of claims are suitable for SSO. Thus we would expect around 50 claims in May and 25 in December. Time required: **18 hours (Dec), 37 hours (May), 5 hours (August).**

**Conclusion**
With RR, Group meetings with students, Induction, “Open Door” matters, etc, this position is easily fully employed during teaching semesters and they will be expected to continue support activities during the examination period. Thus, all preparing and improving resources and systems, statistical analysis will be confined to the approximately 16 weeks outside of that period.