



SFHEA Case Study Exemplar

Written Case

Study Title:

Academic Support and Advising

This case study is based on the impact of my work to develop and support our Academic Support offer during my tenure as Undergraduate xxxx which has made a significant improvement to the student experience in the xxxx.

In 2012/13 the xxxx began to roll out a personal tutor programme for the first time. The role – Academic and Professional Advisor – was intended to provide personal support to students on an individual and/or small group basis and to align with SHU’s *Student Experience Priorities* published in 2011/12. It was no surprise that SHU’s student experience priorities placed more emphasis on the need for individual tutoring. In the wider HE context, there is increasing recognition that students value contact with staff, particularly frequent face-to-face contact outside of the classroom (Chickering and Gamson, 1987; Gibbs, 2010) (K3, V4).

Shortly after coming into post in March 2013 the xxxxx experienced a significant dip in overall student satisfaction scores, falling to 78%. In analysing the results I realised that Academic Support was an area that had seen a significant drop from 84% to 79%. This was despite xxxx introducing the role of APAs. I realised that there was mixed practice in xxxx as to the engagement of both staff and students with the role and that the guidance provided to staff on the remit and responsibilities of the role had been limited. I also sensed that perceptions of the value of students having a named academic as their individual advisor were mixed (A5, V3). Therefore, alongside two of my management colleagues I designed an evaluation programme for both staff and students. This involved a questionnaire which was submitted to all xxxx academic staff and a workshop with a small number of student representatives. The questions asked and discussions focused on:-

- APA meetings: when, where, format
- perceived engagement by students and staff
- typical topics for discussion
- understanding of the role
- perceptions of the guidance offered by xxxx
- what further support staff need

The findings were that

- examples of best practice were needed
- clearer guidance on the role was required
- APAs needed to be involved in induction activities

- there was mixed practice within courses and students were aware of this
- timetabling of APA sessions was typically desired by both students and staff
- many students perceived the role as only being of value if they were struggling
- Monitoring and recording of APA meetings, by both staff and students, was generally poor.

Through my work in this area I have learnt that academic tutoring plays a central role in developing students' identity as HE learners. Indeed, the student feedback I gathered supported academic research which has found that close academic staff-student interaction via the academic tutor (APA) role could be a significant predictor of successful student transition and feeling of belonging (Briggs et al, 2012) (V1).

These findings gave me the evidence to improve the staff and student experience of Academic Advising over the coming years. I re-wrote xxxx guidance on the APA role and have updated it each academic year before circulation to students and staff. I have developed positive relationships with Timetabling colleagues as we move towards timetabling APA sessions as much as possible when required by course teams. Students have fed back that, especially at the beginning of their university career, sessions that are timetabled are better understood to be a part of regular academic activity. This is understandable as they make the transition to being higher education learners and the subsequent autonomy that they will develop as they progress (A2, A4).

Following the conclusion of our study, I was invited to be the Faculty of xxxx Project Lead on the implementation of the Academic Advice Framework, which was approved by the Academic Board in February 2015. This has enabled me to work further in responding to the earlier feedback from students and staff in xxxx, and work with colleagues across the University to identify and learn from best practice. As part of the implementation team I have contributed to workshops to design SHU's professional award in academic tutoring - the *Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) Academic and Personal Tutoring Course* which is accredited by the Staff and Educational Developers Association (SEDA). As part of this project I attended two national CRA conferences on Academic Tutoring to learn about developments in academic tutoring across the sector. I designed and ran a workshop for xxxx teaching and student services staff to assess our progress in the field of Academic Support and its alignment with the NUS' benchmarking tool and I plan to run the same workshop with a wide range of Undergraduate students in the coming year. One of the key findings of my discussions with staff was the perception that academic tutoring was not universally valued by teaching colleagues and that those who had worked hard to support students in this way were not adequately recognised or rewarded (A5). Therefore, subsequent to the successful pilot of the SEDA-accredited course, I lobbied my senior managers in xxxx to fund a larger number of colleagues to complete the course (our Faculty only funds one person per department) as I saw the course as an effective way to both support and develop staff with a particular interest in the role, but also to promote the visibility and value of tutoring students as an everyday part of the academic role. As a result, 5 members of xxxx, across several UG courses, will be undertaking the SEDA course in 17/18. A medium-term goal will be to support and empower these 5 staff in becoming 'Senior Tutors' who will then take a leadership role in developing and supporting good academic tutoring practice with our xxxx staff in their respective subject fields (A4, K6, V4). I have enjoyed engaging xxxx staff in this area of work by sharing evidence-informed

practice in order to improve our own offer, thus deepening their understanding of the power of academic tutoring for student learning. Staff have been provided the opportunity to rethink how best to support learning and professional development to fit the particular needs of their own courses and student outcomes. UG xxxx course teams are now implementing Academic Advice as a routine part of their curricula with some particular successes. Highlights include:

- extended induction and placement support programmes where students are taught by their own APA (BSc xxxx). Crucially, L4 retention on this course has significantly improved from 85% to 94% on the first year of this programme.
- course-wide scheduled APA activities/end-of-year reviews (BSc xxxx). NSS scores for Academic Support have risen to a high of 88% in this course

Overall satisfaction scores have risen in xxxx from 78% in 2013 to 93% in 2016. Satisfaction with academic support has increased in xxxx from 79% in 2013 to 90% in 2016 which is the second highest in the University. I have shared xxxx's Academic Support practice at the xxxx Student Experience Group, Retention Enhancement Group and at CRA national conferences.

Our range of academic support practices, particularly our cause for concern process of which APA support plays a crucial part, received a commendation in our Periodic Review report in 2016. However, I believe there is still more to be done and one of my goals for next year is to facilitate the sharing of best practice in academic tutoring by developing xxxx's contribution to SHU's Teaching Essentials resources on Academic Tutoring (V3).

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