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Presenting and publishing with personal tutees to empower international student voices: the tutor's reflections

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Presentation abstract

There is an increasing need to adapt to the changing needs of a diverse student population (Walker, 2022). Enhancing international students' experiences is one of the strategic drivers in the higher education sector and the UKAT Association aims to develop personal tutors' practice in the UK (UKAT, 2025). This presentation focused on a personal tutor's reflections on a partnership with two international postgraduate tutees, aiming to improve support for international students through personal tutoring. The tutor co-presented with the tutees at an external conference and an internal institutional event on the topic of supporting international students through personal tutoring, and they also collaborated in writing for publication. Through this collaboration, they developed resources that were incorporated into the personal tutoring handbook to enhance tutors' support of international students and foster inclusivity.

This presentation critically reflected on the practical outcomes of this partnership, highlighting the benefits and challenges of working closely with international students. A student's relationship with their personal tutors has been described as the most prominent relationship between students and staff members (Gravett and Winstone, 2022). This presentation showed the importance of collaborating with international students to build meaningful relationships with them and inform the development of resources that promote inclusive academic practices.

The presentation had practical implications for academics, personal tutors and learning developers, offering a model of partnership with their university students to co-create oral and written outputs. These collaborations can strengthen students' sense of belonging and enhance their academic and professional development. For international students

adapting to a new learning culture and environment, such initiatives foster inclusivity and create rewarding experiences for both students and staff. This approach empowers student voices and contributes to the design of content and resources that ensure equity and inclusivity in higher education.

Keywords: staff-student partnership, international students, personal tutoring, co-presenting, co-publishing.

Community response

This session addressed two areas of interest for the learning development community: the role of personal tutoring in supporting student learning and development, and working collaboratively with students, both of which present opportunities and challenges for staff and students alike. Keen to enact change within their own contexts, participants welcomed the opportunity to ask questions, seeking to deepen their understanding of the personal tutor's role and the nature of the support provided:

Q: You mentioned that you were a subject lecturer in the school of education. Is this the reason why you were able to act as a personal tutor? Do learning developers also have such opportunities to be involved?

A: Yes, being an academic personal tutor (APT) was one of my duties as a subject lecturer in the School of Education. Learning developers do not have academic personal tutoring duties. Only academic staff act as APTs, apart from in a few schools, such as the School of Education, where some Postgraduate Researchers are APTs, and the School of Medicine, where some practitioners (i.e. doctors/clinicians, etc.) are APTs.

Q: Do staff need to do any training to become a personal tutor? If so, what does the training involve?

A: There is not any compulsory university training for new personal tutors, but each school has an academic personal tutoring lead, who can organise an induction for new personal tutors, introducing the main duties of the role. The university provides various opportunities for personal tutors to develop their practice, including several training sessions they can

register to attend. Personally, I have been involved in designing and delivering a training session on 'Supporting international students through Academic Personal Tutoring'; it was rewarding noticing that the attendees from different schools benefited from the session. Such sessions can also provide a safe space for personal tutors to reflect on their practice and share any concerns with their colleagues.

The university also has an Academic Personal Tutoring handbook, which provides important information about the role and includes resources to support new and existing APTs with their practice. For example, it includes resources on supporting international students, mature students and students from under-represented backgrounds. Additionally, an APT Teams Community has recently been created; personal tutors and colleagues interested in personal tutoring can join this to discuss APT-related topics and connect with other members of the community.

Q: As collaborating to work on conference presentations and book chapters goes beyond the remit of wellbeing support, some overlap between supervisors or course tutors seems possible. Has there been any discussion with the students' supervisors about the nature of their presentation and publishing to provide more cohesive support to the students?

A: Thank you for raising this. The personal tutor is a formal point of contact who provides holistic support to the students, assisting them to review their academic progress, reflect on their learning, and supporting their personal and professional development. One of the main aims of this role is to ensure the students feel they belong in the academic community. My approach to personal tutoring involved building rapport with my tutees (Wisker et al., 2008), showing empathy (Zhang, 2015) and providing scaffolding (Schell, 2023) to help them thrive at the university. The dissertation supervisor provides guidance in relation to the student's research project.

International students can struggle to find opportunities to develop their presentation and collaboration skills, their confidence, and share their perspectives on their university experience. Working in partnership with two international students to co-present at an external conference and an internal university event gave them an opportunity to share their own recommendations on academic personal tutoring and contributed to enhancing their confidence, their sense of belonging in academia, and their professional skills. Therefore, I contributed to both their academic and personal growth. As their personal

tutor, I fulfilled my role in supporting their personal and professional development and helping them develop a sense of belonging. I arranged relevant meetings to help them prepare for the presentations, and they felt comfortable to reach out to me with any additional questions they had. I also signposted them to use relevant resources and attend relevant skills sessions at the university to improve their presentation and writing skills. The writing-related resources also helped them with co-authoring the book chapter (Stylianou et al., in press).

It would have been helpful to have discussions with the students' supervisors to support the students. Unfortunately, this was not feasible, as the students were allocated a supervisor a few days before the conference presentation, and we submitted our book chapter proposal at the end of the students' supervision period. The students co-authored the book chapter after they submitted their dissertation. However, having written their dissertation helped them feel more comfortable with writing their book chapter sections. We also arranged online meetings to set clear expectations, share concerns and discuss the next steps. Going forward, I am open to collaborate with relevant colleagues to support such initiatives in the future.

Author's reflection

It was great to bring together learning developers who are keen to work in partnership with their students. I was delighted that my work was received as a good example of an effective collaboration with students.

During the online session, there was some discussion on personal tutoring; for example, an attendee shared that their institution does not offer individual personal tutoring support for postgraduate students and highlighted that international postgraduate taught students would benefit from personal tutoring, considering they only have a year to complete their Master's. There were also further questions on the role of an academic personal tutor: Learning Developers may not be familiar with the duties of a personal tutor; therefore, answering these questions hopefully enhanced the community's understanding of this role at my institution.

My main goal for this session was to share the benefits and challenges of working in partnership with international postgraduate taught students to co-present and co-publish, and inspire colleagues to take such initiatives. I encourage the community to consider involving international postgraduate students in these activities, as they have limited time for their course and can benefit from such experiences, which enhance their confidence, build their CVs, and support the development of transferable skills. By asking them to share their voices on their university experience, they can realise that their opinions matter, which can, in turn, improve their overall university experience. I am looking forward to sharing the book chapter with the community once it is published, so that the community can gain insight into the students' perspectives.

Acknowledgements

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