



University
of Exeter

Student Academic Support Project

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Reimagining pastoral support



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Spring
2023

- Review of personal tutoring and pastoral support in response to inconsistencies identified in student experience.
- Sector consultation and identification of best practice, development of data dashboard.



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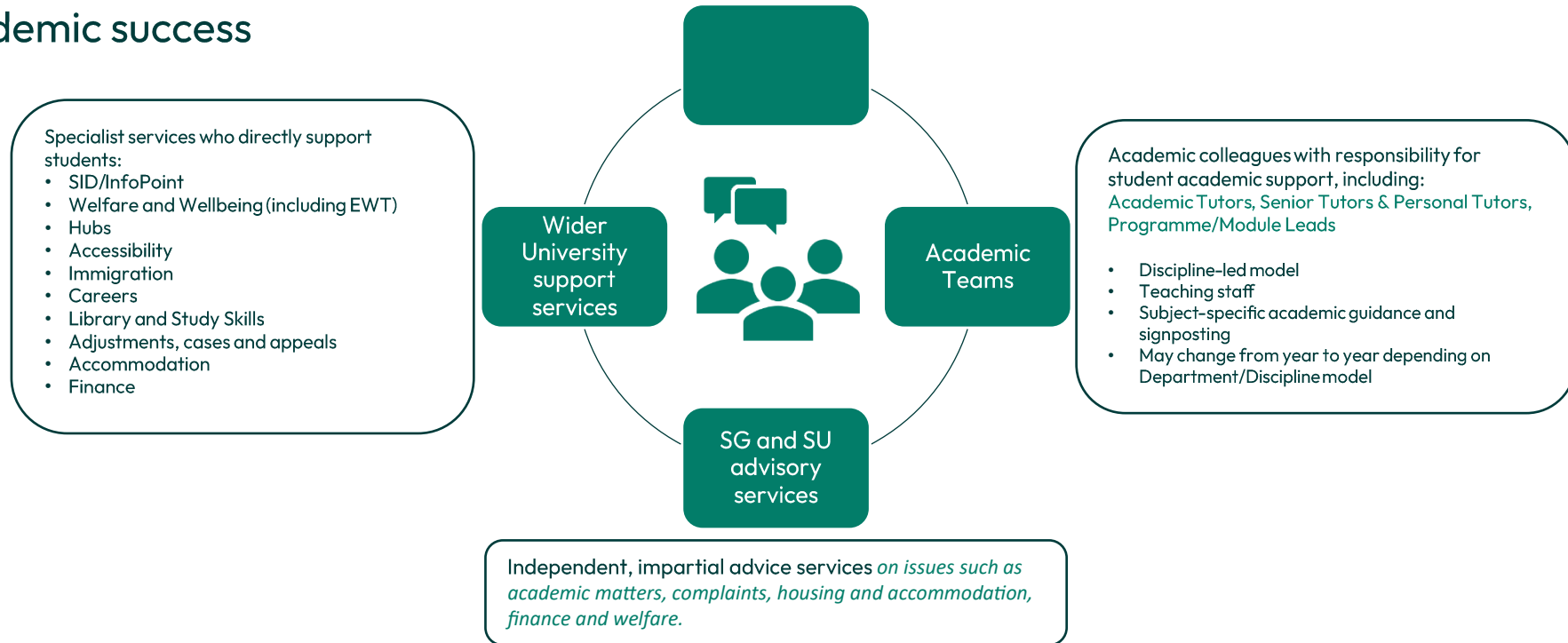
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Student Academic Support Model

A new approach to supporting students' academic success



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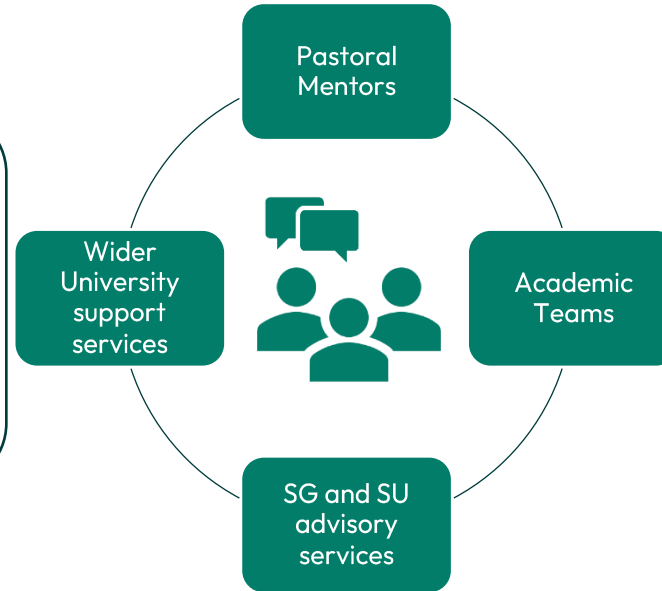
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Academic colleagues with responsibility for student pastoral support:

- Central support model embedded in the department.
- Proactive pastoral support to enable academic success.
- Support student engagement events in the Department
- Ownership of finding solutions for students in liaison with wider university and Student's Union services.

Specialist services who directly support students:

- SID/InfoPoint
- Welfare and Wellbeing (including EWT)
- Hubs
- Accessibility
- Immigration
- Careers
- Library and Study Skills
- Adjustments, cases and appeals
- Accommodation
- Finance



Academic colleagues with responsibility for student academic support, including:
Academic Tutors, Senior Tutors & Personal Tutors,
Programme/Module Leads

- Discipline-led model
- Teaching staff
- Subject-specific academic guidance and signposting
- May change from year to year depending on Department/Discipline model

Independent, impartial advice services *on issues such as academic matters, complaints, housing and accommodation, finance and welfare.*

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Autumn
2023

- Small scale pilot in two disciplines in Exeter and Penryn.
- Role, model and ways of working co-created with pilot disciplines and first cohort of pastoral mentors.

Spring
2024

- Phase 2 roll out to two larger disciplines and launch of data dashboard.
- Evolution of the model in response to departmental feedback.



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Autumn
2024

- 60% of departments had pastoral mentors in place.
- High demand for roles from student support specialists across HE, FE, schools and other sectors.

2025

- All departments had pastoral mentors in place by 1st August 2025.

It's a team effort

Professor Adam Watt

Jess Johnson

Helen Cameron

Ciaran Stoker-Diver

Pablo Loren-Aguilar

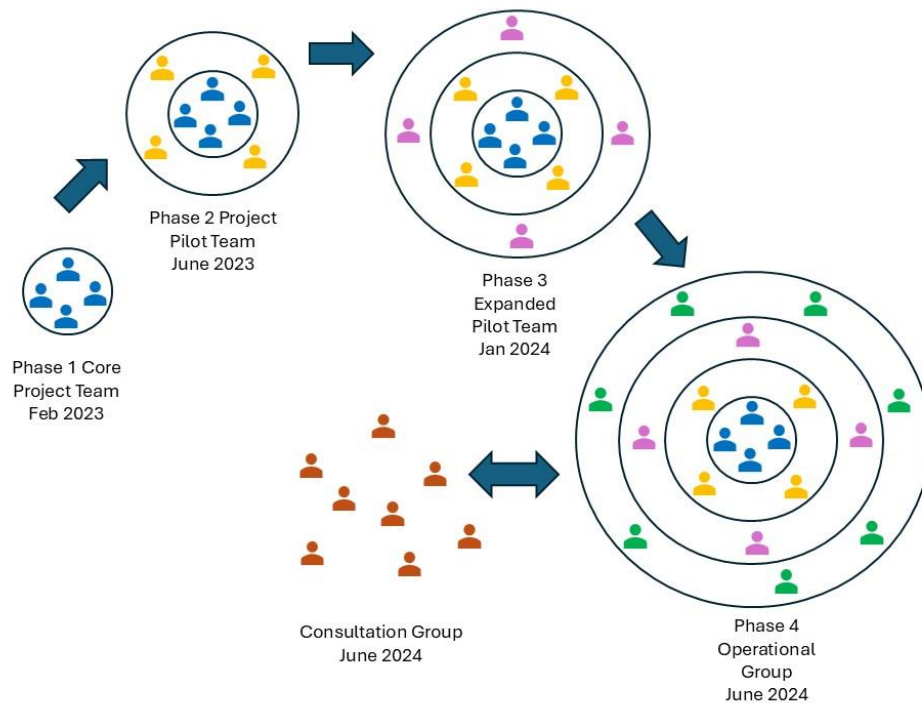
Will White

Becca Middleton

Julie Marsh

Hannah Lyons

Hannah Jordan



Key features of our model



- Early identification of students who may be struggling, data led and through referral.
- Clear lines of responsibility are key; who identifies risk, who acts.
- Clear escalation/de-escalation process to ensure no student falls through the gap.
- Presence; the importance of a present friendly face close to students and staff, not just at the end of an email/inbox.
- Clarity of message; your wellbeing is important to us, this is not about unsatisfactory progress, not about visa status, not about fitness to practice, it's about whether you are OK or need any help.
- Decoupling from disciplinary processes to focus on wellbeing.
- Compassionate communications.

Key benefits of the Pastoral Mentor model



Proactive, data-informed outreach within departments

Bridge between Academic, EWT, and other University Support Services

Focus, **expertise and capacity** to look at the **whole student experience**

Triage initial student queries in a safe environment within their department community

International students often feel less comfortable reaching out to teaching staff

Named contact **embedded** within the department

Early identification of student support needs

Professional, **consistent, in-person** support

Positive impact on **workloads** of departments

SAS Project – Closure Report (2023–2025)



What Has Been Achieved

All project aims, activities and outputs have been delivered:

- Student Academic Support model rolled out across all depts.
- Recruited all PMs and 3 Faculty Lead PMs, CoP embedded.
- Finalised PM Handbook, Induction and other BAU resources.
- Student Support dashboard created and embedded.
- New Academic Tutoring Model in TQA Manual.
- External evaluation (TASO/IPSOS) and sector engagement.
- SSAG established for governance and enhancement.
- Marketing and Comms Plan delivered to promote PMs.

Evidence of impact

- In 2024/25, PMs supported 3626 students through challenges relating to their academic studies and personal wellbeing.
- NSS 2025: positive trends in Academic Support (87.2% +2% from 2024) and Wellbeing questions (81% +5.8% from 2024).
- Reduction in number of students withdrawing (12% reduction in year to date – 100 students).
- Reduction in exams absence: August 2025 – 24.3% in 2025 (down 11.7% from 36% in 2024).
- Sector-level recognition and positive TEM feedback 2025.
- TASO Evaluation – pending

Post-project closure dependencies and actions

- Delivery of Student Connect and Attendance & Engagement Projects.
- Handover of ownership and ongoing enhancement of Dashboard and DPIA to Digital Insights.
- EWT/PM WoW – joint model, step-care model in Cornwall.
- Promotion of findings and inclusion in APP.
- Dep/faculty actions – training in January, FTE oversight, supervision support, SSAG review of support pathways/FL role, adoption of PM/tutoring model.
- Exeter Academic Working Group oversight on PDR/progression,
- Marketing and comms ownership of resources – video, banners.



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Academic Feedback

*The PM role has been **transformative** for our department, fundamentally **enhancing student and staff wellbeing and the culture of care**. Redistributing the emotional and pastoral labour that fell to academic staff has created clearer boundaries, more sustainable workloads, and a stronger sense of shared responsibility for student support. Our PM has made an extraordinary impact in a short time, not only ensuring that students receive timely and specialist support but has also allowing academics to refocus their energies on teaching and research without the constant pressure of managing complex pastoral situations. **The result has been a cultural shift; our department operates with greater confidence, cohesion and care.***



Student Feedback

“Thanks for helping me get in touch with them [Student Support] and for our chats, they really made the hugest difference to me and made me feel like Uni and kind of everything else would all be ok!”





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Student's Guild Feedback

Previously, we frequently heard stories of students bouncing from service to service, trying to find the 'correct' entry point for them. PMs have changed that, now acting as a familiar face in each department, bridging the gap between students in crisis and the services created to support them. Having seen Exeter before and after its introduction, the impact on our students is immeasurable."





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PM Feedback

*It has been a pleasure co-creating the handbook and other resources. As we moved into BAU, it was crucial to bring colleagues together from across teams to blend perspectives, challenge assumptions, and design resources that truly reflect our shared practice. Co-creation created a strong sense of collective ownership and **helped align our ways of working, strengthening relationships and giving everyone a stake in shaping the student experience.** These strengthened relationships are improving daily collaboration."*



Welfare Team Feedback

*Working with PMs has been so valuable helping us identify students in need of support. Their access to and use of academic and other data, as well their regular contact with tutors and department staff **helps us see where students may need support sometimes before they realise themselves.** In many cases this has allowed us to refer students to appropriate services earlier and **work together to provide direct support to help them manage their studies***



Lessons learned



- There's never 'enough' evidence for some, sometimes you have to enact change because it's the right thing to do and be confident you can take people with you over time.
- Meet colleagues where their concerns lie.
- It's an emotive area, acknowledging the great work some colleagues have done/do but the pressure it puts on them and how change can help staff and students.
- Co-creation is powerful, we were clear on recruitment that we wanted pastoral mentors to help us shape this and clear with departments that we wanted to co-create to fit their needs.



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Please reach out for more details

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