

**LINCOLN HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH AWARDS (LHERA)**

**FINAL REPORT 2017-18**

*Please complete all sections of the proforma below and return to* *lheri@lincoln.ac.uk* *by 29th June 2018*

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| **Project title** | “How can I be an effective personal tutor and what is out there to help me do this?” A qualitative study into staff perceptions of their personal tutor role and the influence of key resources.  |
| **Project lead** | Ben Walker |
| **Other collaborators** | Alison Raby, Janice Kearns |
| **Project duration**  | 7 months |
| **Project dates** | *From:* 01/12/2017*To:* 29/06/2018 |
| **LHERI funding received** | £750.00 |
| **Please provide an overall account of the project describing the research questions, ethics approval process, brief overview of the methodology and main activities, including how students and collaborators contributed to the research** *(max 500 words)*  |
|  Our overall research question was as follows. * How effective do personal tutors perceive their support of level one students to be when working with students at risk of underachievement and/or withdrawal?

In answering this question, we will also seek to answer the following. * Prior to the provision of tailored personal tutor resources for level one students and staff, what resources and support do personal tutors draw on to address challenges in supporting level one students at risk of underachievement and/or withdrawal?
* After engagement with tailored personal tutor resources for students and staff, what are personal tutors’ perceptions of the support and resources available to address the challenges in supporting level one students at risk of underachievement and/or withdrawal?

Ethical approval was granted after application to School of Education ethics board.This is a practice-related research project into the effectiveness of personal tutoring practice at the University of Lincoln. Qualitative data was gathered in two stages: pre and post intervention (the intervention being the provision and use of tailored resources created as part of the Office for Students Catalyst funded *Intervention for Success* Project). The resources are both student-facing (for use in individual and group tutorials) and staff-facing (to enhance professional development in the role).The research population consisted of eight personal tutors across the four colleges of the university: Arts, Science, Social Science and LIBS. Aiming to ensure the data was as representative as possible, the participants were identified using a quota sampling technique across a range of variables, the key ones being gender, level of experience and subject discipline.The qualitative measure of semi-structured ‘one to one’ interviews was used. To increase the likelihood of gaining valid data, the interviews were preceded by a pilot interview with a key practitioner or ‘informant’ who is knowledgeable in the field and this informed the final set of questions to be used. The advantages of ‘one to one’ interviews include confidentiality, potential greater willingness to disclose and appropriateness for the short timescale. The relatively short length of the project is reflected in the twelve week period for personal tutors to use the resources. Two interviews per tutor took place, one before and one after this period followed by a thematic analysis of transcriptions.  |
| **What challenges, if any, occurred during your project and how did you overcome these?***(Max 250 words)* |
| Some minor challenges were encountered during the project. These were around the scheduling of the interviews and the participants meeting the criteria to use the resources during a twelve week period. Due to the participants being busy academics, establishing firm interview dates took some time and multiple requests in some cases but was achieved for all participants and the challenge overcome by applying flexibility and sensitivity to the participants’ workloads. The requirement for the stage 2 interviews was that participants used one or more of the student-facing resources and one or more of the staff-facing resources prior to the interview taking place. On two occasions the interviewee had not used both sets. However, this was resolved, albeit later than the planned interview period, by re-scheduling a second part of the interview at a later date by which time the participants had used the other set of resources. One of the participants started their maternity leave before the end of the twelve week period meaning their stage 2 interview had to be brought forward a month before the planned stage 2 interview period. However, the resources had been used and this did not compromise the data gathered. In addition, in order to try to achieve some specificity, the research questions focussed on level one students at risk of withdrawal and underachievement. However, it was not always straightforward to phrase the interview questions to include this. However, this was overcome by prompting interviewees to give an example from this cohort of students. Also, when participants sometimes answered about students generally we still considered this to be valid data for the project.  |
| **Please outline the major tasks and milestones delivered in this project. How far do these follow the outline in your original application? Please detail any variations and additional deliverables that occurred** *(Max 250 words)* |
| The original timeline for the award application is attached as a separate document. Also attached is the more comprehensive and expanded timeline which we used once the project was underway to give us a more detailed view of what needed to be achieved. As can be seen from the latter, the major tasks and milestones were achieved with some minor variations. These included the following. We decided not to include the pre-interview survey because we considered this an unnecessary extra step given that the participants would be sufficiently abreast of topics to be discussed and their limited time. There were some slightly late starts to stage 1 interviews as a result of waiting for the approval from the ethics board in order to commence the research. The twelve week research period where resources were used was shortened for one participant who started maternity leave but this did not affect their use of the resources. One interview was completed later than planned in June, as discussed previously. An initial analysis of the stage 2 data has been carried out to date but a full analysis has not been completed which is slightly alter than planned. As the Gant Chart shows, planned evaluation through the Guskey framework (Guskey, T.R. (1998) The Age of accountability. *Journal of Staff Development*, 19(4): 36–44) and Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) standards (http://guidebook.eif.org.uk/eif-evidence-standards) is still to be completed which resulted from prioritising other issues. This will be completed as appropriate if required by the planned peer-reviewed journal article write up (see following section). Lastly, the dissemination plan, in terms of submitting to journals was too ambitious, certainly in the time. As seen in the following section, we have decided to submit an article to a different journal to those mentioned in the plan.  |
| **Please provide details of all outcomes and outputs from the Higher Education Award funded project, including any activity you plan to take forward beyond the funding –** *this will include specific details of dissemination / scholarly outputs, evidence of impact or potential impact from the research processes and findings, plans for ‘next steps’ with the research etc.* |
| This project was planned as the first phase of a longitudinal study into the effectiveness of personal tutoring practice at the University of Lincoln. The proposed second phase will further the study of effective personal tutoring by evaluating students’ views and performance and the influence of the tutoring resources and, by implication, tutoring practice, on this. This second phase has, in effect, started, or been partially completed, since we have carried out a student focus group as part of the *Intervention for Success* Project. Students’ experiences of personal tutoring were evaluated along with assessing the influence of the student-facing materials, in conjunction with tutoring practice, on this experience. Since the resources were also produced as part of *Intervention for Success* then the analysis will form part of the evaluation of this national research project. In terms of dissemination through conference activity, we have presented at the 4th annual personal tutoring CRA seminar at Sheffield Hallam University in October 2017 and at the UK Advising and Tutoring (UKAT) annual conference in March 2018. Related to this, during the lifetime of the project, the project lead was asked if we wanted the project to be a part of UKAT’s research mentoring programme and it is now a part of this. As such we attended the associated research retreat in January 2018 where research practice on this project was shared with colleagues from HE institutions around the country and support was gained from experienced practitioners. Future conference activity includes the project lead presenting on the research at the annual international conference of NACADA (The Global Community of Academic Advising) in July 2018 and a proposal has been submitted to present at the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) conference in December 2018 relating the research and its findings on personal tutoring to the conference theme of whether excellence and inclusion can co-habit. Although only at the early stage of drafting the proposal, the project lead has decided to submit a journal article on this research to the peer-reviewed journal *Active Learning in Higher Education*. The reason for submitting to this journal, rather than those stated in the original timeline, is that the research can be seen as an updating of existing research which features in the same journal.  Regarding impact, this research has gathered much qualitative data which evidences the impact of the personal tutor resources created as part of the *Intervention for Success* project. The processes, in terms of the structure and content of the interviews, were welcomed by participants and, as such, provided a model for the ways in which qualitative data can be gathered on issues which cross over between the academic and student support fields. Potential impact includes the continuing integration of the findings into the University of Lincoln’s review of, and approach to, personal tutoring and professional development. On this last point, the initial findings informed the pilot of a training and support programme for personal tutors in 2017-18 and the fuller findings will inform its future version in 2018-19.  Two of the activities planned beyond the funding have been mentioned previously, phase 2 of the research involving student evaluation and informing future professional development of personal tutoring at the university. In addition, and also related to university processes, is planned discussion between the researchers and relevant staff with responsibility for the personal tutor dashboard and personal tutoring blackboard sites on practical implications of some of the findings. This is aimed at improving dissemination of materials to support personal tutors and their tutees. |
| **Please provide outline details of expenditure against the budget** *(this should be available from TechOne)***. If your project costs varied from the original application please provide details.**  |
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| Project budget code:- 0003637 |  |  |  |  |
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| Income | Budget | Actual | Remaining |  |  |
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| Pay N/A |  |  |  |  |  |
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| Non-pay |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | £750.00 | £398.00 | £352.00 |  |  |
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| **Is there any feedback you would like to give to the HE Research Institute to assist us in the development of these awards in future?** |
| The process was straightforward and we wouldn’t suggest any changes.   |

Completed by……… Ben Walker



Date ………………… 28.06.18

Please submit this report to lheri@lincoln.ac.uk no later than …………….