



UCL

# Personal Tutor Review Conclusions and Recommendations



# Introduction

## About the review

In February 2023, EdCom approved a Review of Personal Tutoring at UCL. This Review has been overseen by the Personal Tutor Review Steering Group, reporting to EdCom. The Steering Group is co-chaired by Dr Kathryn Woods (Pro Vice Provost, Student Academic Engagement) and Dr Peter Fitch (Associate Director, HEDS). The Steering Group includes representation from UCL Sabbatical Officers and SU, all UCL's Faculties (mixed membership of academic and professional colleagues), and all student facing and supporting professional services (SRS). David Grey, CEO of UKAT (the UK sector body for advising and tutoring) has played a vital role as the external Steering Group member. He has supported the Steering Group in assuring its own quality. He has also offered insights into how far UCL aligns with sector-standards for personal tutoring and academic support.

### Review Aims:

1. Improvement of UG and PGT student experience of academic support;
2. A better understanding of the differences needed between UG and PGT personal tutoring;
3. Improvement of staff experiences of personal tutoring and academic support;
4. To identify a simple and coherent model for personal tutoring at UCL – supported by appropriate management arrangements, policies, and digital technologies.

## Methodology

The Review was undertaken through desk-based research into UK literature on advising and tutoring, including regulatory materials (QAA and OfS) and sector-standards (UKAT), and publicly available information about personal tutoring policies and practices at other UK HEIs. It also considered existing sources of evidence about the UG and PGT student experience at UCL, such as the results of the National Student Survey (NSS), national postgraduate surveys (PGS/PTES), UCL's Annual Programme Survey (APS), UCL SU's 'Priorities for Education' reports, and staff personal tutoring award submissions. A full list of sources is available in the Personal Tutoring Report.

As part of the review, UCL students and staff were surveyed (April and May 2023) to provide detailed insights into experiences of personal tutoring. There were 298 responses from staff and 484 responses from students. This survey evidence has been treated as an indicative sample. In Spring 2023, the Review team asked Faculties and Departments to provide information about their local personal tutoring arrangements via a mapping exercise. This information was collated into an appendix within the Personal Tutor Report.

Julie Evans (Faculty Tutor, Brain Sciences) conducted a deep-dive review of PGT personal tutoring arrangements through interviews with Faculty Tutors. This was considered in the preparation of the Personal Tutor Review Report. Members of the Department Tutor Network (established in September 2023), and University Mental Health Charter Mark Oversight Group, were consulted on the survey results and asked to input into the development of recommendations. There was an illuminating discussion about personal tutoring at the SU 'Education Zone' with SU sabbatical officers and Academic Faculty Reps. The Review team have, on request, facilitated discussions about the Review at Faculty Education Committee meetings.

## Results

A substantive Personal Tutor Review Report, detailing initial findings, was considered by EdCom in October 2023. [The Report](#) was subsequently circulated to the UCL community for feedback. The feedback exercise closed on the 1 Feb 2024. The consultation results are available [here](#).

The current paper presents the findings and recommendations of the Personal Tutor Review that have now been approved by EdCom (25 April 2024). Given the level of risk identified and potentially significant level of impact (financial/workload) that approval of the recommendations might create for UCL, a version of this paper was previously considered by UMC. UMC endorsed the recommendations and implementation approach. It particularly welcomed proposals for a stronger academic focus for personal tutoring; the development of a policy to support increased clarity its purpose; redevelopment of the Department Tutor Role; and the implementation of a Personal Tutor Dashboard.

# Personal Tutor Review

## Conclusions

### Main Findings

The Personal Tutor Review has uncovered many exceptional examples of personal tutoring at UCL. It has been a privilege to learn more about the innovative, committed work that has been put into personal tutoring by some departments and many individuals across the university. We know, from student evidence, how much students benefit from, and appreciate, the support provided by well-delivered personal tutoring. At its best, personal tutoring can play a transformational role in a students' personal, academic, and professional development.

Unfortunately, however, the Review has discovered that student experiences of personal tutoring at UCL are not consistently high-quality. It has identified that there is significant variation in experience within and between Departments and Faculties. Only 48.5% of students who responded to our survey reported that 'personal tutoring' is working well for them. Things are worse when we look at the staff perspective; with only 40.9% of staff agreeing positively against the same question, relating to their experience as personal tutors. Considered alongside other student survey evidence, this suggests that changes to the UCL personal tutor system are required to improve staff and student experiences.

#### **Students and staff both told us that they saw 'academic support' as the primary value of personal tutoring.**

Students told us that they wanted this support to be provided by academics from their department, and that they wanted the same tutor (where possible) for the duration of their programme. They also told us that they wanted meetings to be proactively organised by their personal tutors on a termly basis, and for there to be a clear structure for meetings; focusing on enabling a general academic 'check-in' and goal setting. They told us that personal tutors were not their preferred source of support regarding wellbeing concerns.

Academic staff told us that they felt ill-equipped to provide students with 'pastoral' and wellbeing support, and that this was a source of anxiety.

Academic staff told us that they believe that personal tutors can offer the most value for students by providing academic support. Academic staff repeatedly commented that they would like to see expansion of the student advisor scheme introduced during Covid-19. They also told us that they would like personal tutoring to be included in workload allocation and improved training.

The Review has identified two underlying issues that contribute to poor student and staff satisfaction with personal tutoring experience at UCL:

- Lack of clear understanding of what personal tutoring is for and how it supports students and the delivery of education and student experience.
- Inconsistency in how personal tutoring is led, managed, administered, and supported across Programmes, Departments, and Faculties, leading to a sense of inequity of experience for both staff and students.

It has also identified one point of consensus across staff and students:

- That personal tutoring can provide most value to students through a focus on academic support delivered via regular termly check-ins where students can discuss progress and be directed to additional specialist support (e.g. wellbeing, academic skills, or careers) where required by tutors.

The review has also positively identified two opportunities that we can lean into to align with our foundations and ambitions for [Excellence in Education](#) (agreed in 2023). We should be mindful of these as we develop a new approach to personal tutoring through the implementation of the Personal Tutor Review recommendations:

- Supporting students through a personal tutoring system could become a mechanism for supporting the delivery of a rigorous and intellectually challenging UCL Education. It could be developed to support students to achieve their best work; make the most out of their time out of university

(e.g. engage in Student Life activities); make study choices; and prepare for their futures (further study and careers).

- Our approach to personal tutoring could be developed to better align with our organisational values of care and respect by taking a regular human-centred ‘check-in’ approach. Guaranteeing regular check-in meetings could also help us, as an organisation, ensure student welfare and put in place support where student welfare is at risk.

## Urgent Next Steps

Approval of the Personal Tutor Recommendations and Implementation Plan should be viewed as the first critical step that UCL needs to take to improve academic support. The implementation plan sets out a phased approach for change over a three-year period, which will enable incremental improvement and, ultimately, effective implementation of a new policy and operational model for personal tutoring in the 2026/27 academic year. We will look to work with Departments and Faculties who wish to be early adopters of the new model before 2026/27.

At the same time, we need to continue work towards the implementation of a Personal Tutor Dashboard for 2024/25. This forms part of a wider piece of work that will see us bring in more robust operational procedures for academic support, and improvements in the quality, availability, and interoperability of student data. The Dashboard project began in February 2023. It is overseen by a Steering Group chaired by Daniel Farrell (Director of Student Operations). The group is currently developing a set of student data principles and initial dashboard product that will hopefully be available for use by personal tutors from the start of the 2024/25 academic year. This will be key to enabling us to use data to ‘safeguard’ our students and support their academic progress more effectively.

Unfortunately, however, that some of the issues surfaced by the Personal Tutor Review are too complex for recommendations to be offered by this Review and at this time. These matters include decisions about the local provision of professional student wellbeing and advisory support, SoRA management, and staff workload for personal tutoring. These require wider and/or more specialist input from relevant teams and/or fall out of the direct scope of the Personal Tutor Review. These items are listed as being ‘for further consideration’ below.

# Personal Tutor Review Recommendations

All the evidence above – set out in further detail in the Personal Tutor Review Report - has informed the design of the recommendations for the enhancement of personal tutoring at UCL that are listed below, grouped under 9 sub-headings.

A high-level, indicative, timeline for the implementation of the recommendations is provided below (page 8). This outlines the aim to have a refreshed personal tutoring system for UCL, underpinned by a new Personal Tutor Policy, fully implemented for the start of the 2026/27 academic year.

The implementation of the recommendations will be overseen by the Personal Tutor Review Steering Group and ultimately EdCom.

## List of Recommendations

### Strategy

1. Personal Tutoring to become known as ‘Personal Academic Tutoring’ to emphasise its primary focus on the provision of academic (programme/ disciplinary related) support to students by academics.
2. Approval of the following statement about personal academic tutoring’s purpose at UCL: *‘The purpose of personal academic tutoring at UCL is to guide and support students in their academic, personal and professional development during their time at university’.*

### Governance, Regulations and Policy

3. Develop and implement a Personal Academic Tutor Policy. This will set out minimum expectations around personal academic tutoring for staff and students. Among other things, this will establish the responsibilities and accountabilities of staff in Departments and Faculties with respect to personal academic tutoring.
4. All Personal Academic Tutors to be UCL members of staff (e.g. not PGR students and/or external teaching affiliates).

### Operations and Practice

5. Develop and implement a new operating model for Personal Academic Tutoring at UCL that facilitates its effective management, implementation, and monitoring of its delivery by academic and professional service staff. This will include agreed routes through which students can raise concerns if personal tutoring is not being delivered as set out in the Policy.
6. Develop and implement new Personal Academic Tutoring resources, including Personal Development and Progress Forms for students, to guide Personal Academic Tutoring discussions, form part of the student record, and support the generation of student references.

## Meetings

7. Each student is offered at least 1 meeting with their personal academic tutor per term. These meetings should be for a minimum of 15-minutes. Some of the meetings (such as introduction meetings or meetings with first-year students) could be delivered to students in small groups (less than 6). These meetings could be held in-person or online (using university supported systems e.g. Zoom or MS Teams).
8. All staff who act as Personal Academic Tutors will offer a minimum of 2 x office hours (in-person or online) per week. Staff will not be expected to meet with students outside of set termly meetings or office hours (although staff may choose to do so if they wish).
9. It will be made clear to students that they should go to Student Support and Wellbeing and/or local department/faculty student advisors for mental health and/or wellbeing support (immediate or ongoing). Likewise, it will be made clear that for specialist careers advice, students should consult the Careers Service. Personal Academic Tutors should signpost students to such services where appropriate.

## Monitoring

10. Student attendance at Personal Academic Tutor meetings be monitored and for there to be active follow-up with students who do not attend. Where is cause for concern (which will be defined by the policy), there will be a requirement for escalation through appropriate channels. (This process will also be set out in the new policy).
11. Personal Academic Tutors to make a standard UCL record of all Personal Academic Tutor meetings.

## Administration

12. Guaranteeing that students can expect to receive references from their Personal Academic Tutor on request and that these are stored as part of their Personal Academic Tutoring Record.
13. Students should be assigned a Personal Academic Tutor and/or notified of changes in personal tutor allocation the week before the commencement of any academic term.
14. All students to be assigned a Personal Academic Tutor from programme's 'home' Department.

## Roles, Responsibilities and Accountabilities

15. Every Department will be expected to have a dedicated 'Head of Academic Support and Student Welfare role'. This will replace the Department Tutor role as currently described in the Academic Manual and oversee personal academic tutoring and student case work. The Department Tutor's current responsibilities with respect to education academic quality and student experience will be transferred to the new 'Director of Education and Student Academic Experience' Departmental Academic role.
16. Develop and implement a new role descriptor for Personal Academic Tutors.

## Training and staff support

17. Develop and implement basic mandatory introductory online training for all Personal Academic Tutors as part of the Organisational Development offer.
18. Develop and implement new required training for Heads of Academic Support and Student Welfare.
19. Enhance our continuous professional development training and our UKAT accreditation offer.

## Digital Platforms, Data and Communications







20. Delivery and implementation of a Personal Academic Tutoring dashboard that enables students and staff to review attendance and academic progress (assessment and feedback), alerts staff to where students' may be considered at 'risk' and identifies where students have special requirements (e.g. SoRAs or are on Support to Study Plans).
21. Develop and implement a digital system for monitoring Personal Academic Tutoring meeting attendance and storing meeting records and student references, ideally connected to the Personal Academic Tutoring dashboard.
22. Develop a set of learner dashboard principles and/or a policy which clearly explains how and in what ways their data will be gathered and processed via the Personal Academic Tutor dashboard.
23. Improved and updated communications (including webpages) about Personal Academic Tutoring at UCL for staff and students, including an internal communications plan to achieve cultural change to support the implementation of all the recommendations.

## For Further Consideration












- Undertake a review of the entire system of student support, based on the Advanced HE Student Needs Framework, focusing on the alignment of academic and wellbeing support and approaches towards promoting student wellbeing. This will also consider alignment between the Personal Tutor Policy and the Student Support Framework and other relevant student support policies.
- Review UCL's central academic skills support offer, including where it is located and how it is advertised/visible to students.
- Review the student Support Advisor scheme, Transition Mentor Scheme, and options for the provision of locally-based professional service delivered wellbeing support for students beyond year 1.
- Explore links between the implementation of the Review recommendations and ongoing work relating to disability and SRS led work into the design and implementation SoRAs, Personal Evacuation Plans, Extenuating Circumstances, and Support to Study.
- Development of a consistent workload model for Personal Academic Tutors and Heads of Academic Support and Student Welfare, as mapped against numbers of students supported and other workload considerations.
- Ongoing development of digital systems to support learner engagement and personal tutoring, including possible use of AI chat bots for routine academic support enquiries.
- Work with UCL SU to explore the development of local peer mentoring schemes, including as part of the Department Hub and Societies model.
- Streamlining processes for providing students with references.

Recommendations













**Before start of 24/25 session**

-  **New purpose**  
EdCom approval for a clarified purpose for personal academic tutoring UCL.
-  **Rename**  
Edcom approval for renaming Personal Tutoring - 'Personal Academic Tutoring'.
-  **Operating model development**  
Develop a new operating model for Personal Academic Tutoring that facilitates its management, implementation, and monitoring.
-  **Communication & culture change**  
Improve communications and webpages about Personal Academic Tutoring for staff and students, including a plan to achieve cultural change.
-  **Data dashboard**  
Delivery and implementation of a Personal Academic Tutoring dashboard enabling students and staff to see attendance and academic data.
-  **Data principles**  
Develop a set of principles which explains how data will be gathered and processed via the Personal Academic Tutor Dashboard.

**2024/2025**

-  **Policy development**  
Develop a Personal Academic Tutor Policy. This will set out minimum expectations for staff and students.
-  **Operating model socialisation**  
Socialise the new operating model for Personal Academic Tutoring at UCL.
-  **Communication and culture change**  
Continued communication and culture change activities.
-  **Improvements to dashboard**  
Further improvement to the Personal Academic Tutoring dashboard, including meeting management tools.
-  **UKAT and professional development**  
Enhance our continuous professional development training and our UKAT accreditation offer.
-  **Mandatory training - development**  
Develop and pilot mandatory introductory online training for all Personal Academic Tutors.
-  **Senior training - development**  
Develop and pilot new required training for Heads of Academic Support and Student Welfare.
-  **Resources development**  
Develop new Personal Academic Tutoring resources, including Personal Development and Progress Forms.
-  **Departmental link**  
All students to be assigned a Personal Academic Tutor from programme's 'home' department.
-  **Role - Head of Academic Support & Student Welfare**  
Develop and implement a role descriptor for the new role.
-  **Head of Academic Support and Student Welfare**  
Every department to have a dedicated 'Head of Academic Support and Student Welfare role' replacing the Department Tutor in overseeing personal academic tutoring.

**2025/2026**

-  **Policy implementation**  
Implement the Personal Academic Tutor Policy.
-  **UCL staff only**  
Mandate that all Personal Academic Tutors be UCL members of staff.
-  **Operating model implementation**  
Implement the new operating model for Personal Academic Tutoring at UCL.
-  **Communication and culture change**  
Continued communication and culture change activities.
-  **Mandatory training implementation**  
Implement mandatory introductory online training.
-  **Senior training implementation**  
Implement new training for Heads of Academic Support & Student Welfare.
-  **Resources implementation**  
Implement new Personal Academic Tutoring resources.
-  **Assignment and reassignment**  
Students are assigned a Personal Academic Tutor and/or notified of changes in allocation the week before the commencement of any term.
-  **Meetings**  
Each student is offered one meeting with their personal academic tutor per term for a minimum of 15 minutes, in-person or online, sometimes in small groups. Personal Academic Tutors will offer a minimum of two office hours per week. Staff will not be expected to meet with students outside of this.
-  **Signposting**  
It will be made clear to students that they should go to Student Support and Wellbeing or local student advisors for mental health and wellbeing support and for careers advice, the Careers Service.
-  **Monitoring**  
Student attendance at Personal Academic Tutor meetings will be monitored and logged, non-attendance followed up and concerns escalated appropriately.
-  **References**  
Students will be guaranteed to receive references from their Personal Academic Tutor on request.

**Key**

-  **Strategy**
-  **Governance, policy and regulations**
-  **Operations and practice**
-  **Digital, data and communications**
-  **Roles and responsibilities**
-  **Training and staff support**





# UCL

