Supporting Students at Scale

In this paper we share feedback collated during the UKAT Annual Conference 2021 session *Supporting Students at Scale*.

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Topic introduction:

The pandemic has caused a seismic shift for the sector. We have seen a fundamental change in the student experience and the expectations of personal tutors. With most universities planning for a blended learning approach for the next academic year, we also recognise that new methods will be required to support students at a distance and at scale.

We wanted to take this opportunity to address the changing landscape, challenges personal tutors face and ideas for improving the experience for both students and staff.

- 20 representatives of Higher Education institutions across the UK took part in the session
- Delegates were asked to provide their feedback on two questions via Padlet

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What is your biggest challenge to supporting students at scale?

Not "seeing students" fully - difficult to make judgements about well-being - student looking stressed/ ill

Getting students to reach out earlier rather than when it's too late, they become disengaged and stressed

I get frustrated when you reach out to students and they do not engage

Scale - not able to reach everyone with staff available

Screen fatigue - for students and staff!

Having others in the background - home environments

Having the time and space to build relationships

Less time with everything else!

My own motivation is a challenge - how to keep reaching out and not 'give up' if they don't seem interested

Following up on students not attending / contributing

Staff student ratio and work plan

Reaching students before any help is too late. Making students understand that it is a two -way process

Getting PTs to engage in a timelier manner - they sometimes leave it so late

More tutees to contact more often with no more time

Engaging staff/faculty to take a whole School approach as staff/faculty are struggling and demotivated not to mention overworked

Students not switching on screens in an online setting

The best way to get info out - email is hit and miss

The main themes noted in the discussion were having less time to do more and student expectations of their role and responsibility in the student / tutor relationship.

What could be done to help prepare for the next academic year to put more support in place for personal tutors? How can expectations be set for students to help them realise the importance of engaging?

Do you have ideas and suggestions to help improve support for students or any best practice to share with your peers?

I explain that as their personal tutor, I also need to write their reference- so I need to know who they are, to be able to write a positive one

Make use of Analytics

Monitor VLE activity/engagement

Create a personal tutor online space

I worry about approaches like 'your engagement is your responsibility' - as I worry that it gives staff a 'get out' of considering the barriers and anxieties that students have. Needs to be a balance!!

Often when students do presentations, it is the first time they realise how disconcerting it is to have all cams off - it can be a good teaching/learning experience for the issue of no cameras on

MS Teams Groups for personal students useful - allows chat in a virtual university space

In my first group seminar with my first years, we decided on which donkey we wanted to adopt from the donkey sanctuary – it helped to give an early shared experience

Show students what engagement you can see - they are always bemused when you question them that they haven't been on the VLE and then shocked that you have the analytics

Student feedback - developing networks with class reps, etc.

Discuss the benefits of personal professional development

Make yourself known so that you are approachable for students to come to you, not always you contacting them. We are on all modules and webinars (all online)

Selling the benefits of engagement at the start

The feedback suggests that there is more to be done to create a closer and more accessible tutor and student relationship. Creating spaces that are dedicated to tutoring groups and having shared experiences to connect through would be beneficial. Being able to easily understand engagement, that is also shared with students would provide useful insight to help conversations and set expectations for how and when students contribute.

To find out how the StREAM student engagement platform can help scale student support using engagement analytics visit our **website** or **request a demonstration**.