

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

**FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

School of Education

**The role of the personal tutor
in a general further education college**

by

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
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THE ROLE OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR
IN A GENERAL FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGE

By Alec Charles Carrotte

This research was a systematic investigation of the role of the personal tutor in a general further education college. The 'incorporation' of colleges and subsequent government policies created a need to review the existing concept of personal tutoring. This area of professional educational practice has not previously been the subject of any focused, in-depth research by other general further education colleges, their concentration being mainly on exploring additional or alternative models of student support, usually in terms of student retention and achievement issues.

The aim of the research was to explore whether the interpretation and implementation of the personal tutor role since the incorporation of colleges was meeting the contemporary needs of all stakeholders within the tutorial support system.

A case study approach was adopted that utilised qualitative methods. The data was collected via a combination of documentation, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The sample was drawn from students, staff, and all levels of management, thus ensuring that a fully comprehensive range of views was sought.

The main conclusions were:

- All stakeholders need to agree on the purpose of personal tutoring, before other aspects of service delivery, such as tutorial style, content, and availability, can be considered
- All stakeholders need to agree on the role and responsibilities of the personal tutor, before issues of recruitment, training, and practice support systems can be addressed
- The establishment of a positive student/personal tutor relationship, depends on selecting staff with the appropriate personal qualities and skills, and having in place a range of supportive resources, policies and practice guidelines

The result of the research offers a challenge to the current perception of personal tutoring in the case-study college, and an opportunity to consider developing a single model, that would be better positioned to meet the contemporary needs of both individual students and groups of students.

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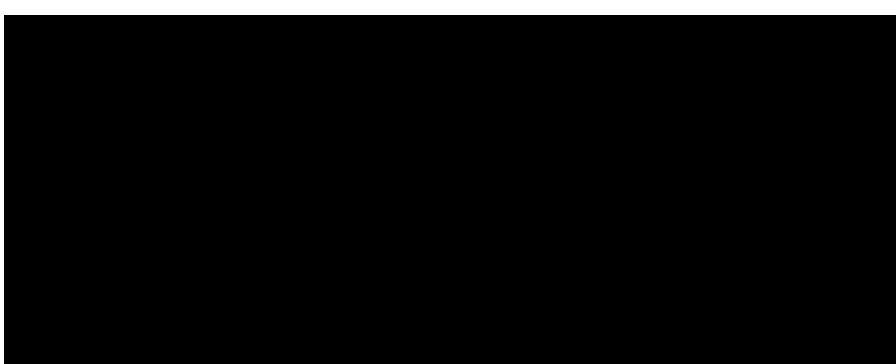
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Declaration of Authorship

I, Alec Charles Carrotte, declare that the thesis entitled *The role of the personal tutor in a general further education college*, and the work presented in it are my own.

I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- None of this work has been published before submission

Signed.....

Date.....30th JUNE 2007.....

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my late mother

Eileen Ridge

List of Abbreviations

ALI	Adult Learning Inspectorate
DfES	Department for Education and Science
DHSS	Department of Health and Social Security
FE	Further Education
FEDA	Further Education Development Agency
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
FENTO	Further Education National Training Organisation
GCSE	General Certificate in Secondary Education
HE	Higher Education
HND	Higher National Diploma
ILT	Information learning technology
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
NATFHE	National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education
NIACE	National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OFSTED	Office for Standards and Training in Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SAR	Self Assessment Report

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this research is on the role of the personal tutor in a general further education college. The study took place within the Department of Health and Social Care at a large General Further Education College on the south coast of England, and involved two main student groups, the 16-19 years full-time students and the over 19 years part-time students. The majority of students were female. This case study is located within an analysis of the relevant literature relating to personal tutoring and an awareness of the increasing need to pay attention to student support, given the national government's strong policy focus on widening participation and social inclusiveness.

As the choice of topic to research often may be traced to events and experiences that have had a profound effect on one's life, and triggered motivation to explore further, it is useful for me to reflect on why I chose to research personal tutoring.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MY INTEREST IN PERSONAL TUTORING

From an early age, I attended church and duly assimilated Christian values that highlighted service to others, particularly those who had been disadvantaged by their life experiences. These beliefs later led me to seek out a career in social work, a profession that has the welfare of others as its focus. Whilst doing this work, I came to realise that a 'supportive relationship' based on trust, honesty and mutual respect, could help to boost people's self-esteem, confidence, and also motivate them to change their circumstances. The values that underpin the practice of social work, are based on a set of Christian principles that had been identified by Felix Bistek, a catholic priest, and adopted by the social work profession as the central tenets of its practice. These principles embrace such notions as acceptance, uniqueness, genuineness, non-judgementalism, confidentiality, starting where the client is, travelling at the client's pace, and client self-determination. During my 19 years as a social worker, I was able to

develop both group-work and 1-1 'casework relationship skills' based on these values, in order to support and motivate people in making changes to their lives. In addition to bad life experiences, many of my clients had also usually 'failed to benefit' from the school system, with many having been subjected to bullying from either their teachers or their peers and sometimes both.

During my time as a social worker, I was also involved in supervising social work students, which again enabled me to utilise my casework relationship skills, in motivating and supporting students to a successful conclusion of their training courses. I was helped in this task, by having been a lifelong learner myself in many different educational settings and having experienced a variety of good, bad, indifferent and even non-existent tutoring and supervision. Consequently, I came to appreciate the key role that can be played by an effective student/supervisor relationship, in guiding and supporting a student to success. It was this knowledge and experience, coupled with my personal and professional values, which led me to consider and undertake employment as a welfare lecturer and personal tutor in a general college of further education.

The need for colleges to become more 'business-like' and 'cost efficient' following 'incorporation' in 1992, resulted in many cuts being made to student provision, particularly in the area of student 'contact hours' (Lumby and Tomlinson, 2000:149), (McDonald and Lucas 2001:218). In such an atmosphere, it was difficult to argue that the formal tutorial support time already afforded to full-time students should also be made available to part-time students, not least in terms of equal opportunities or prevention of high student drop-out rates. Fortunately, the department where I worked had a commitment to fund tutorial support time for part-time students, even though this only amounted to 2 hours per week per student group, which equates to approximately 30 minutes per term, per student. Understandably, within such a small amount of tutorial contact time, it was proving difficult to utilise my casework relationship skills in order to support and motivate over 100 adult part-time 'returner' students each week, a large proportion of whom had personal and/or domestic problems that were causing barriers to their learning progress. A significant hindrance to this process

in identifying and addressing these personal problems, was the lack of any designated tutorial accommodation, that would provide students with both privacy and confidentiality when disclosing private matters.

At the time of formulating my research proposal for this study, there was no 'formally agreed' job description for personal tutors within the college. The only job description that existed had been inserted by management into the Tutorial Handbook without any college-wide consultation with personal tutor practitioners, or any consultation or formalised agreement with the 'recognised' Trade Union NATFHE (National Association for Teachers in Further and Higher Education).

Also at this time, no formally co-ordinated, obligatory training programme for personal tutoring existed within the college. There did exist however, a few occasional and optional INSET (In-Service Training) sessions that addressed some tutoring issues. However, these were mainly based around the standardised tutorial support system that management were seeking to install, and were not very well supported, with myself on some occasions being the only person in attendance. This was in spite of the college having several hundred lecturing staff, a large proportion of whom were personal tutors.

Neither had my training as a lecturer on the CGLI 730 (City and Guilds London Institute) or Cert Ed (Certificate in Education), specifically or even adequately prepared me for the role of a personal tutor.

Because of the lack of a 'formalised programme' of training for personal tutors at the college, other than for a few optional INSET workshops, it was in the main, left to individual practitioners to design and refine their own practice systems. To this end, I made various changes to my tutorial practice including the use of administration time for tutorial support purposes, but I was still losing some 25% to 30% of my students each year. I shared my concerns with colleagues who all had their own individual methods of coping, such as converting one-to-one tutorials into more group tutorials, converting lecture time into tutorial time,

leaving requests for tutorial support to the students to initiate, using other students as 'proctors or peer mentors' and in one case, not offering tutorials at all. A further revelation came via my one-year secondment as a College Quality Manager, when I discovered that there was a wide variation of views across departments, and amongst the various professional sub-cultures regarding the usefulness of 'personal support'. An example was the difference in attitudes between 'construction tutors', and 'health and social care tutors'. This was also noted in research on this institution by Page (1996:171).

REASONS FOR CONDUCTING THIS PIECE OF RESEARCH

As a result of these early, informal, observations as a personal tutor and a quality manager, there appeared to be a whole range of institutional barriers preventing me from living out my personal practice values and clarifying and developing my role as a personal tutor. If such barriers could be overcome, this would enable me to fulfil my role with relevance to both myself and my students. These barriers seemed to be:-

- Range of professional sub-cultures that gave differing emphases and status to the notion of 'personal student support'
- A 'one-fits-all' prescribed standardised tutorial support system, that was not appropriate to the needs of all student groups, particularly those over 19 years old who are engaged in part-time study
- Insufficient formal tutorial time allocated, in order to meet the needs and demands of students
- Differing interpretation of the role and responsibilities amongst students, staff and management

- No formally agreed job description that would identify the role and responsibilities of personal tutors, and thus help to differentiate the personal tutor role from a range of other support roles emerging within the college student support system
- No formally co-ordinated comprehensive training programme or practice support mechanism existed in order to develop the necessary skills and qualities of staff undertaking the role of personal tutor
- Heavy workload (administration, teaching and tutoring over 100 students) which prevented me from living out my practice beliefs of delivering a high quality service via the forming of a trusting student/personal tutor relationship
- Lack of designated tutorial accommodation to ensure privacy and confidentiality when students wish to disclose personal matters within the student/personal tutor relationship

My reaction to the above was to begin to question my understanding and interpretation of the role of Personal Tutor. Was I doing too much? Was I doing the right things? Were the coping mechanisms of colleagues really working? What did college management expect of me in my role? Eventually, in order to seek some answers to my concerns, I turned to research, but found relatively little in the existing literature related to my specific concerns.

THE ROLE OF RESEARCH IN FURTHER EDUCATION

In comparison with Higher Education, research is relatively new within the world of Further Education, and in fact has not prospered too well either at the local level or nationally, for various reasons (Martinez, 1997:132), (Fryer, 1998:8), (Elliott 1998 cited in Green and Lucas 1999:214), (Howard, 1998:13-14), (Green and Lucas 1999:1), (Culham, 2001:27), (Martinez, 2001:1), (Anderson et al,

2003:499), (McGivney, 2003:33), (Scaife, 2004:1), (Robson, 2006:103).

At the case study college, any formally organised research has been small-scale, sporadic and focused on specific topics such as tutorial content or equal tutoring opportunities. Any national attempts to improve student support in further education via government-funded research projects, has primarily focused on the needs of the 16-19 age group and their learning retention and course completion within the further education system (Green 2001), (Martinez 1997, 2001). The resultant conclusions of such research has usually been to suggest a combination of prescriptive tutorial programmes and improved administrative procedures, as a way of supporting and retaining students. Consequently, with a few exceptions, there has not been a great deal of research into the topic of tutoring in general further education colleges, and particularly into the role of the personal tutor. In addition, a large proportion of the research already conducted by individual colleges, seemed to either ignore or marginalise the important role that can be played by the tutorial support system, and in particular the role of the personal tutor as part of the process in any retention and achievement strategy, preferring instead to focus on exploring alternative and less expensive models of support (see chapter 2).

DEFINING TERMS

A further factor of concern at the outset and throughout the study, was the lack of agreed terminology in the literature, in the research reports, or within my own organisation. Consequently, for the purpose of this thesis, I have constructed my own definition of some key terms and these appear at the end of this thesis. Kumar (1999:45) comments that, “operational definitions give an operational meaning to the study population and the concepts used...Your arguments must convince others about the appropriateness of your definitions”.

My definition of personal tutoring is as follows:

‘Personal tutoring is the establishment of a close two-way relationship, that can help to motivate students in achieving their learning outcomes, and if necessary, support them in overcoming any past or present barriers to learning, whether personal, academic or institutional’.

It is against this background that I conducted the research reported here.

POSITIONING THE RESEARCH

Context

The research was undertaken at a large general further education college on the south coast of England. The 21 participating students were all following studies in professionally qualifying health and social welfare courses of between one and three years duration. Most of the participants were female, with ages ranging from 16 years to 60 years. A broad range of college staff were involved in the study, namely, 10 personal tutors, 2 members from student support services, 3 members from staff training, 3 members of junior management and 3 members of senior management.

Limits of the study

Whilst recognising the diversity of the student population at the case-study college, it has only been possible within the constraints of this modest research study, to discuss the personal tutoring service provided for two groupings, namely 16-19 years full-time students and 19+ part-time students. Consequently, other student groupings have of necessity been excluded from the research:

- women returners (coming back to study after a long gap since school)
- students from ethnic minority groups
- students from other countries
- students with disability
- students of different ages
- students of different gender

In addition, the small scale of this research study, plus the strategy adopted of ‘case study’, places some constraints on its ‘generalisability’ to other general further education colleges. A final consequence of such a small-scale study with its attendant limitation on wordage, is that it has only been possible to provide a ‘snapshot’ of the case study college, at a particular period of its tutorial evolution.

Timeline of the research

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 1999 | Examination and review of the historical college documentation.
Conceptualisation of the research study |
| 2000-2003 | Operationalisation of the research (student Focus Groups, student and staff Semi-structured Interviews). This period also included collating and analysing the gathered data after each stage of the operation. In addition, the process was underpinned by a continuous ‘search and review strategy’ for any further relevant material contained in literature, research journals, research reports or conference papers published during the period of the research operations. |
| 2004-2006 | Final data analysis and writing up of the Thesis. |

FRAMEWORK OF THE INVESTIGATION

In order to provide a framework for the investigation, I constructed a list of areas drawn from my experience and what little specific literature there was available, that relate to the performance of the role of personal tutor, namely:

- External and internal influences on tutorial provision
- Purpose, content and style of tutorial sessions

- Tutorial entitlement (availability of tutorial support)
- Role and responsibilities of the personal tutor
- Training and practice support required to develop the skills and qualities necessary to become a personal tutor
- Relationship between student and personal tutor

These areas were then formulated into a research question and a set of sub-questions as follows:-

RESEARCH QUESTION:

What underlying factors within the personal tutorial system are crucial in supporting student learning?

Sub-questions:

1. What impact have external and internal influences had on the nature of the personal tutorial support offered, in terms of purpose, style, content and availability?
2. What are the perceptions of students, staff and management, regarding the roles, responsibilities, skills and qualities of the personal tutor, particularly with regard to the recruitment, training and practice support of personnel?
3. What do students, staff, and management, see as the main requirements for the formation and maintenance of a positive, working relationship, between a student and a personal tutor?

FORMAT OF THE THESIS

This thesis is presented in six chapters, which trace the attempts by the College in question, to meet the requirements of national government policies, by converting them into operational strategies in order to meet management's perceived needs of students. Chapter 1 examines the origins and changes in conceptions of the personal tutor role and seeks to place the research within a national and local framework. Chapter 2 presents a review not only of the available literature on the topic of 'personal tutoring, but also the findings of small scale research projects within colleges of general further education. Chapter 3 outlines the research process, both methodology and implementation, whilst chapter 4 presents the findings of the data collection process. Chapter 5 attempts to offer some meaning to the data collected, in terms of the current and future practice of the student tutorial support system in the case study college. The thesis is concluded in chapter 6, by bringing all the earlier considerations together to form, both concluding statements promoted by the research, some recommendations for possible future research, and also an evaluation of the process that underpinned this study.

CHAPTER 1

PERSONAL TUTORING - INFLUENCES AND CONTEXT

“The concept of the personal tutor is one which is much evident in professional education and is commonly accepted. However, the nature and role of the personal tutor is ill-defined”

Richardson 1998 (cited in Gidman et al 2000-401)

This chapter will provide a brief history of the development of the role of the personal tutor within the field of post-compulsory education. In addition, it will also provide an outline of the attempts by a local college, to develop the personal tutoring role against a background of much political change within the further education sector.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROLE OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR

Early concepts of the role

As part of a book concerned with the subject of helping and supporting students in higher education, Earwaker (1992:45) suggests that the origins of the one-to-one tutoring relationship can be traced back to the traditions of ‘Oxbridge’, when young gentlemen lived away from home and tutors were required to look after their students ‘*in loco parentis*’ for behavioural and intellectual development. He goes on to state (1992:103) that “University teachers were clearly expected to keep control over their students” and that “this disciplinary oversight was understood as having a religious as well as moral dimension by virtue of the fact

that teachers would all be, as a matter of course, ordained clergymen". He summarises (1992:103) by saying that, "this goes a long way to explain why student support has been conceived in terms of '*pastoral care*' with strong religious and moral overtones". Hence Earwaker presents an early vision of a tutor as a rather paternalistic and perhaps patronising figure carrying out the care and duties of a parent. This early perspective of the role is also confirmed by other authors, (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight 1998:94), (Wheeler and Birtle 1993:15). This 'parental role' is supported by Jacques, (1992, cited in Gray, Griffin and Nasta 2000:195), who states that a key function of being a personal tutor is "to be a 'friendly parent' to students who feel lost in the comparative anonymity of FE and HE".

The early traditional view of the tutor role was eventually changed, in that with the lowering of the age of consent in the late 1960's, young students were now regarded as adults, and were not amenable to tutors attempting to control their lives (Fisk 1967:129-130), (Silver and Silver 1997:30). Consequently, the notion of tutors being '*in loco parentis*' was eventually dropped by Universities both in the USA and UK in the 1980's (Silver and Silver 1997:31), although, the overall concept of *pastoral care* remained a key function within the tutoring role. A reason for the retention of 'pastoral care' could be that the student profile was also changing, in that students of all ages and social backgrounds were now entering University, bringing with them many of the personal problems of everyday living.

Defining the job title

In later years, many roles emerged in the Universities embracing the word 'tutor', examples being, placement tutor, course tutor, year tutor, welfare tutor, subject tutor and so forth. Such an expansion in the usage of the title of 'tutor' confirms that the role required some clarification and modernising, not least in terms of tasks and approaches. Earwaker (1992:45) suggests that although "the designation 'tutor' is notoriously unclear, it remains the most appropriate word to use in the British context for members of teaching staff...insofar as they have responsibility for helping and supporting students". He goes on to argue (1992:45)

that “although in some contexts the word may be used almost inter-changeably with ‘lecturer’, it would not as a rule be used unless there was some suggestion of pastoral care, and some likelihood of one-to-one contact with each student”. He further asserts (1992:45), that in this context, it is used “in preference to the term ‘lecturer’ which appears to suggest nothing more than a very formal teaching role”. Wheeler and Birtle (1993:15) take this clarification a stage further when they state that they “prefer the term ‘personal tutor’ because it implies that there is a responsibility for students’ personal well-being as well as other duties that may be incorporated into the role”. The view that lecturing and tutoring are two discrete roles is also acknowledged by Kerry and Tollitt-Evans (1992:11-12) who state that “the role of the personal tutor has been well-established for a number of years in Further Education. This role is distinct and quite separate from that of course or subject tutor, although many tutors from choice or necessity adopt a dual role”. Price Moore and Poppino (1983:3) share a similar view when they state that “successful tutoring incorporates positive and encouraging attitudes but is quite different from classroom teaching”.

Role confusion

Kerry and Tollitt-Evans (1992:11-12) suggest that the role of a personal tutor “has become an increasingly diversified role as it has evolved”. This was evidenced by the list of sub-roles nominated by various authors of helper, guide, referral agent, planner, friend, adviser, academic assessor, disciplinarian, parent, manager, advocate, teacher, careers advisor, confidant, change agent, instructor, trainer, supporter, facilitator, supervisor, mentor, coach, guide, colleague, and counsellor (Baxter, Hughes and Tight 1998:95), (Brown and Atkins 1988:120), (Curzon 1997:122), (Huddleston and Unwin 2002:102), (Miller 1982:16), (Walklin 1990:245-246), (Wheeler and Birtle 1993:94-95). This long list of sub-roles could possibly reflect the fact that “the role of the tutor varies in response to the changes in the needs of students as they progress through their academic career” (Wheeler and Birtle 1993:24). Needless to say, that all these sub-roles involve many variations of practice within each title, depending on the author’s definition of the sub-role, the student groups involved, the stage reached in the

learning programme, the personality, training and practice orientation of the personal tutor, and the practice context.

Emergence of a new model for practice

A key historical event had a significant impact on the delivery of modern tutoring. In the late 1960's, a large number of colleges of further education were re-formed into Polytechnics (Silver and Silver 1997:19), and this led to a new development in terms of student support. As the Polytechnics were more vocationally orientated than Universities, they ensured that their students would receive careers guidance, particularly whenever the employment climate became difficult. Such advice was delivered within a new Department of Student Services, and other sources of support were gradually included such as accommodation, finance, medical attention and counselling services. This new type of central service was in addition to the practice of one-to-one pastoral tutoring inherited from the University model of student support, albeit in a re-shaped form and re-labelled from 'moral' tutor to 'personal' tutor (Earwaker 1992:104). It would appear therefore, that it was the Polytechnics who first formally introduced counselling as a key element in the support of students, but alongside, and not in place of the traditional pastoral care element and the academic support element. As Polytechnics were often 'converted' Colleges of Further Education, it is not surprising that general Further Education colleges also adopted this new counselling element within their own system of student support, as did most Universities.

This new two-pronged service approach to the provision of student support gave students the choice of discussing problems either with a teaching or a non-teaching member of staff. This situation appeared to be satisfactory in the late 1960's, when the meaning of the word 'counselling' was generally taken as offering 'advice and guidance', and there appeared to be no problem with personal tutors being acknowledged as capable of giving this form of 'counselling' to students within their overall pastoral role, alongside non-teaching staff who were also offering counselling (*advice and guidance*) within

the Department of Student Services. However, it was when counselling began to develop as a profession in its own right with its own theoretical underpinnings, and offering therapy to people with personal or familial dysfunctions, that teaching staff across the post-compulsory sector started voicing concerns about the emerging counselling element of their role as a personal tutor. In the late 1970's Swainson (1977:118) noted that "tutors are searching for their role in the whole education process: What is the role that suits me?"

Earwaker suggests that part of the ongoing problem of role definition, might be that:

the term 'counselling' continues to be used 'loosely' and is sometimes claimed by those with little or no formal training. Thus the language of counselling is used, in default of anything better, to describe the various kinds of one-to-one conversations. This then leads us into thinking of these other activities as in some way quasi-counselling performed amateurishly by staff who have not had the requisite training.

(Earwaker 1992:109)

Other examples appeared in the literature that demonstrate Earwaker's point about 'loose' terminology (Millar 1982:6-7), (Hamblin 1983:17, 44, 230), (Wheeler and Birtle 1993:32), (Peelo 1994:1), (Bell 1996:47)

Earwaker opposes this trend towards a counselling model of tutoring when he states that:

tutoring is a distinct role, not to be assimilated into counselling; the same is true of the other support roles. ...it is important to resist the suggestion that all the various ways in which students are given help and support, are some form of counselling". He goes on to argue (1992:110) that "this is not to say that tutors do not benefit from acquiring counselling skills and that counselling provision should not be steadily and substantially increased, but it is to question the wisdom of tutors taking counselling as

a model of their tutoring role.

(Earwaker 1992:109)

Wheeler and Birtle (1993:8-9) appear to support Earwaker when they argue that “it is not the role of the tutor... to provide direct advice, for students ...Students must find their own solutions to their problems”. Minton however (1991:102), seems to suggest an almost inevitable involvement with student problems, when he argues that “teachers should not attempt to be counsellors or try to deal with students’ personal problems however, though the relationship with individuals may allow some of that to happen”. It is this important area of the tutorial relationship and other key issues in contemporary personal tutoring, which will be explored in more detail in the literature review in chapter 2.

OUTLINE OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES SINCE THE INCORPORATION OF FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES

The Conservative approach

With the Conservative government’s introduction of the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, the role and status of general colleges of further education drastically changed, in that they were removed totally from the control of the Local Education Authority and became ‘incorporated’, that is, self-governing, albeit they had already enjoyed a partial form of self-governance for a short period before the Act (Lucas in Green and Lucas 1999:45). Lucas goes on to state that “the driving concept behind the FEFC’s model of incorporation was an expanding sector linked to improved 16-19 participation, improved retention rates and the promotion of more adult learning”. Other considerations were those of the elimination of wasteful practices, (via increased student retention and other efficiency gains) and the raising of standards in service delivery.

To these ends, the conservative government introduced what could be described as a quasi-market-place mentality (Lucas in Green and Lucas 1999:42 and 47),

whereby the needs of the consumer (now customers and not students) would dictate the local educational provision/product, and that education and training providers would need to compete to satisfy those demands, thus theoretically leading to the raising of standards. This new business-like ethos of ‘customer power’ and ‘macho-management’ (see Page 1996), was to be re-enforced by two further external ‘drivers’. The first of these was the appointment of local industrial and commercial representatives on the Board of Governors, thus hopefully providing a more managerial and business-like drive to service provision within colleges. The second and major element in this ‘push and pull’ strain on local college managers was to be the new funding methodology. No longer would funding be ‘allocated’ by the Local Authority, but would be provided by central government through its main agency the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and would have to be ‘earned’ via a system of ‘funding units’, by meeting various ‘performance indicators’ at certain census dates throughout the academic year namely, entry, on-programme and achievement (Ainley and Bailey 1997:19-20). If not met, financial penalties would be incurred in the form of ‘with-held funding,’ or occasionally, ‘re-called funding’ or ‘clawback’ (Ainley and Bailey 1997:20), (Shain and Gleeson 1997:447, cited in Fertig 2003:27), (Shain 1998:20). Extra funding units were available for key areas such as remission of course fees, child care fees, additional learning support, and specific programmes such as the ‘enrichment opportunities’ for 16-19 students enshrined in Curriculum 2000.

Whatever the political or educational reasons for this new approach to delivering education to post 16 students, clearly “colleges now had a distinctive air of business about them, characterised by ‘product lines’ dealing with customers, and responsible for the quality and efficiency of their own provision” (Pratt 2000:24).

The New Labour approach

However, just as colleges were adjusting to the new ‘state of play’, there was a change of government in 1997, bringing in the New Labour government

with its strong focus on educational reform. Brushed aside was the old Tory right wing philosophy of the market place with its attendant concepts of individualism and competition, to be replaced by a climate of co-operation, partnership, working together, and shared responsibility amongst employers, employees and the local community, in order to achieve social justice and economic success under the 'mantra' of *education, education and education* (Blair T., New Labour Party Conference, October 1996). This new general outlook meant further operational changes for management and staff within colleges, for although many of the aims and drivers introduced by the conservative government were retained by New Labour, additional ones emerged in the form of a flurry of new government-commissioned reports that un-earthed several 'new' concepts that were to underpin the new government's immediate and future thinking on further education. These were in addition to recent reports commissioned by the Conservatives and inherited by New Labour. All these influential reports are summarised as follows:

- 1996 Higginson Report - which highlighted the need to develop a workforce that was conversant with modern information and communication technology.
- 1996 Tomlinson Report - promoted the idea of social inclusiveness for disadvantaged members of society via further education.
- 1997 Fryer Report - argued that in an internationally changing world of trade, workers would need to embrace a 'lifelong learning' culture of training and re-training in order to provide a flexible competitive workforce.
- 1997 Kennedy Report - This concerned itself with widening participation in Further Education, particularly for those members of society who had not undertaken any form of study since leaving school. It also suggested ways in which disaffected people could be re-engaged in education and training by removing barriers to learning, particularly those of a financial nature. With regard to colleges, the Kennedy Report promoted a constant theme

of the desire to improve quality, responsiveness and local accountability.

- 1999 Moser Report - identified that much work needed to be done in order to remedy a serious shortage of basic skills (literacy and numeracy) within the adult population.
- 2000 Curriculum 2000 – A key feature of this policy is that it allows every school and college to design its own 16-19 curriculum in order to meet the specific needs of their own students. This is to be achieved by a programme of ‘enrichment opportunities’. Such programmes would be supported by government funding. The intention of these programmes is to make a contribution to a students’ wider skills development and also their personal growth.
- 2002 Sweeney Report - outlined the broad areas of programme delivery for both 16-19 and adult student groups, but in particular recommended that adult learners should receive support in the area of personal development. This seemed to be a turning point in the recognition that each student has personal individual needs. This was later acknowledged in the statement by Charles Clarke, the Secretary of State for education who commented that “we recognise that *one size does not fit all*” (Norrington 2003:17). Such a statement, marked a key shift in addressing not only student retention, but also had potential implications for the area of personal tutoring.
- The report also noted that learners must be taught by those with appropriate skills and qualifications, and to this end, argued for the need “to address the under-investment in the professionalism, reward and recognition of the further education and training workforce”.
- 2003 Every Child Matters – This Green paper offered a commitment to support young people in remaining in education and training until 19 years old, in order to not only work towards fulfilling their potential, but also in

making a successful transition to adulthood. Central to this policy, is the notion of improved and 'joined up' inter-agency working, and a commitment to promote a student's well-being in all life areas, particularly for young people deemed vulnerable or disadvantaged. Such a policy places a great emphasis on student support, not least by personal tutors in the area of 'pastoral care'. A further requirement was that every lecturer must hold a teaching qualification by 2010.

Despite the amount of change being placed on the management and staff of further education colleges, the New Labour government has continued to utilise financial incentives to re-enforce its policies (Ainley and Bailey 1997, cited in Fertig 2003:3). Norrington in FE Now (2003:17) comments that "when Charles Clarke announced his well-received settlement for Further Education in November (2002) he promised us 'more for more'". In other words, colleges would get more money, provided they helped to deliver the Government's targets. Margaret Hodge, Education Minister commented in FE Now (2003:5), that "where there's success, funding and freedom will follow. I believe this allows colleges' important flexibility in response to local issues". Such financial drivers to engage the government's vision for education, have also been made available to students, via partial nursery place funding, the Education Maintenance Allowance, and the now defunct Individual Learning Account scheme.

In addition, the government has continued to create a series of agencies to drive these policies at the local level, namely, Quality Curriculum Authority (QCA), Standards Unit, Bureaucracy Task Force, Sector Skills Councils, Standards Fund, Basic Skills Agency, Sector Skills Councils, Learning Partnerships, OFSTED (Office for Standards and Training in Education), and Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA). However, the two main drivers are the local Learning Skills Councils (LSC), and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI), both created by the Learning and Skills Act 2001. (The Learning and Skills Council replaced the former Further Education Funding Council but with wider powers). Both these bodies were to work together to promote the government's set of principles for further education service delivery.

Overview of outcomes

It would seem that according to statistics contained in the NIACE (National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education) 'Survey on Adult Participation in Learning' conducted in 2004, all the efforts by the New Labour government to reform further education, and promote the concepts of lifelong learning, social inclusiveness and widening participation, have not been successful in winning the 'hearts and minds' of the public, particularly with regard to the two key areas of attracting more 'adult students' (over 19 years of age), and retention of existing students. Such a view was endorsed in the summary report of the Institute of Ideas 'Conference on Education' in July 2004, which observed that:

New Labour presented education as a means of creating a better, more egalitarian society, offering hope that all kinds of social problems could be solved. This promise turned sour. Despite the over-blown rhetoric, the reality has been disappointing, and the jargon grates against frustrated ambitions.

(Institute of Ideas 2004:2)

A particular frustration for the government, in its ambition for the further education sector, is the longstanding problem of student drop-out rates, as it would seem a pointless exercise to vigorously pursue a 'widening participation' philosophy if students are going to quit their courses before successful completion. Concerns about completion rates were expressed by both the Audit Commission (1993) and the Chief Inspector in the first Further Education Funding Council Report (1997), whilst in FE Focus (23.10.98), it was reported that colleges had "been ordered to lower drop-out rates and improve performances to meet the government's standards objectives". The article also quotes comments by the FEFC to the effect that "too many students withdraw from their courses or failed to meet their final assessment satisfactorily", whilst the National Audit Office, noted in its 2001 report 'Improving Student Performances: how English colleges can improve student retention and achievement' (HMSO 2001), that "only about half of those who start Further

Education college courses, go on to pass their examinations or assessments”. McGiveney (2003: vii - viii) notes that “the focus on quality assurance in the post-compulsory system has, if anything, grown stronger since 1997, and thus has included an increasing concern with student retention and non-completion”. She goes on to argue that “wastage in any system becomes a focus of interest when efficiency gains are required”. Because ‘retention and achievement’ have become an increasingly important part of the government’s funding strategy to raise standards, and because of concerned reports received from the LSC’s and ALI, it has for a long time, been exhorting colleges to seriously address this problem, primarily by encouraging colleges to undertake research via LSDA funding. How one such college has responded to these government policies and demands in terms of *student support*, will be considered in the remainder of this chapter.

INFLUENCE OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE CASE-STUDY COLLEGE

Raising standards

One of the major long-standing national concerns of both the LSC and ALI, is the issue of student retention and achievement, and it is also well-recorded in a succession of research projects (Green 2001, Martinez 1997, 2001), that student support is a crucial element to any successful retention and achievement strategy.

The main influence on colleges to raise their standards of service provision, has been the requirement by the ALI/OFSTED to produce College Self-Assessment Reports (SAR’s), with a government prescribed content. These SAR’s were usually constructed from a summary of smaller SAR’s from each Academic Department. In order to ensure a rigorous approach to raising standards, colleges were also encouraged to set up quality systems and ways of monitoring that the established standards were being reached.

In the case-study college, the Quality Unit participated in classroom observations and checking the SAR's, prior to any inspection visit. These session observations and the production of team SAR's, revealed a wide range of service practices across the college not least in the areas of *tutorial support for students*, with some students getting excellent tutorial support whilst others received little or none. In order to address this discrepancy in terms of equal opportunities for students, the college in 1997 began promoting a process that was to become an ongoing 'centralised and standardised' approach to tutoring, in order to drive up standards generally. Other colleges nationally had responded similarly as noted by Green when she states that:

Many colleges have moved to greater centralisation in a bid to standardise systems and secure an equitable service for learners across different sites and curriculum areas. Whole –college policies, quality standards, student handbooks, central resource banks are all features of a tutorial offer that aims to standardise the service it provides to learners.

(Green2001:1)

This movement towards 'standardisation' was despite the government's suggestion that a 'one fits all' method does not address the needs of all students.

Another driver of standards was created by the college, when it set up a formal complaints procedure for students who have service delivery concerns. In addition, the Student Council and a system of Student Representation, along with a variety of survey methods were also installed in order to elicit student opinion of the service provided. The result of a 2003 college survey recorded that 85% plus of students were satisfied with the areas of teaching, learning resources, and the support they received from their Personal Tutor. Also in 2003, the Inspection Report gave positive comment about the strong tutorial provision for full-time students, the additional support available to students and the management of counselling and welfare services. This seemed to confirm that the college had met one of its documented key curriculum strategies for 2002-2003, which was:

to consolidate the requirements of 'Qualifying for Success' by further embedding a broad and flexible curriculum for 16-19 year old full-time students underpinned by objective guidance, choice, supportive tutorial and formative target-setting processes and analysis of value-added.

The Inspectorate noted however, that more development was needed in certain areas of service delivery, these being a more rigorous method of calculating and recording student retention and achievement rates, and also the promotion of a comprehensive tutorial support system for part-time students. "This strong tutorial provision provides good academic and pastoral support. However, tutorial arrangements do not extend to all substantive part-time students" (ALI Report August 2003:5).

Efficiency savings

In terms of raising the quality of product and becoming more cost-efficient, the college began to explore ways in which financial savings could be effected. The major expense for any organisation is usually its workforce costs, and this is no different for colleges, which are very much 'labour-intensive'. Although all staffing was affected, it was the lecturing staff that bore the brunt of the reduction in service conditions. Basically, the college reduced lecturer's holiday entitlement, increased the working week, increased student/staff ratios, increased the number of teaching hours and introduced larger classes. Assessors and Instructors were now undertaking teaching roles. In addition, the 'downsizing' of staff also took place, with staff moving to other employment, taking early retirement/voluntary redundancy or succumbing to several rounds of obligatory redundancies, later to be replaced by temporary part-time or casual agency staff. With some of these replacements taking several months to enact, this caused the remaining staff to provide temporary or in some cases permanent cover of all the work to be done, thus making further savings for college management, whilst also adding to the ever increasing workload of the personal tutoring role subsumed within the lecturer's 'new contracts' – (See comments by Ainley

and Bailey (1997:25), Shain (1998:5), and Lucas, in Green and Lucas (1999:32-33) regarding the wider further education picture).

Another efficiency saving was enacted, in the area of college accommodation. Following a 'usage audit' of all rooms in the college, some lecturer's 'rest rooms' were converted into office accommodation for administration staff, as rest rooms were no longer seen as necessary following the removal of staff coffee breaks from the lecturer's work time-table. Consequently, this meant that personal tutors now had no personal 'sanctuary' time or place, in which to enjoy respite from student demands, or indeed offer a quiet and private space to conduct one-to-one tutorials.

Staff were not the only members of the case-study college to experience 'efficiency savings', as full-time students had their teaching week reduced thus reducing the potential time each week, for 'emergency' or ad hoc tutorials. (See Ainley and Bailey, 1997:25, and Lucas, in Green and Lucas, 1999:36, regarding the wider further education picture)

They also had to lose their emotional security/group identity, by having their 'base rooms' withdrawn from them and re-designated as formal teaching classrooms. Budgets were also devolved to Departmental Heads, in order to make the harder choices about tutorial provision at a lower level of the management hierarchy (Hoggett cited in Avis 1996:109, referenced in Shain 1998:4). An example of a devolved budget in the case-study college, would be that of a Departmental Head having to decide whether or not to fund tutorial time for part-time students, which at the time of the study, was not a formal entitlement.

In recent years, some rather innovative methods of reducing costs have emerged within the case-study college. A subtle example has been the *Tutor's Handbook*. Whilst it can be seen as yet a further attempt at standardisation, it carries even greater potential for an efficiency saving. The manual which was originally produced as a set of '*guidelines for tutoring*', has been re-

titled in the latest edition (2001-2002) as '*Tutoring – Policies and Procedures*' and sets out quite firmly the role and responsibilities expected of personal tutors and to this end, contains an 'informal' job description that sits 'inside' the job description of a lecturer. This is perhaps an example of management seeking to exercise some control over the work practices of the personal tutors, as it is generally accepted that whilst it is *optional* for staff to follow *guidelines*, it is recognised as *obligatory* to follow *procedures*. This creeping enlargement of the role and responsibilities of a personal tutor within their main job as a lecturer, again places staff in the position of either diluting student support or maintaining a good level of support by giving up staff hours allocated for other purposes, such as administration time or personal time, thus again making a saving for management. A basic college survey of personal tutors in May 2003, found 97% of all respondents were forced to utilise on average, an extra four hours each week allocated for other duties, in order to meet the tutorial demands of students.

A further example of an innovative efficiency saving, is that even though surveys of staff and students have recommended changes to working practices, decisions have often been delayed for later implementation. Examples would be personal tutor training, the policy to increase tutorial time for full-time students, and the installation of a formal tutorial time for part-time students, all being delayed considerably, prior to their implementation. In addition, the Accreditation Scheme for personal tutors proposed in 1998, has yet to materialise. A further and major example is the slow movement in developing the role and responsibilities of the personal tutor within college. According to college documentation, this was a process that formally commenced in a cross-college curriculum project in 1998, and college management were still talking about establishing a "structured personal tutoring system" when reviewing their curriculum strategies in 2003.

Another strategy to create efficiency savings, has been a drift towards reducing expensive face-to-face contact between students and personal tutors, by suggesting alternative methods such as contact by e-mail, telephone tutoring, text-tutoring or by 'drop-in' sessions where the member of staff can be effecting other work until a student uses the facility, if at all. Recognition that such

methods could be used as an alternative to 'face-to face' tutoring, was noted by college management when in 2002 they recommended in a policy document, the use of e-mail as a valid form of raising standards of contact between students and their personal tutors.

From around 2000, the national trend in colleges has been to promote the idea of Peer Mentors/Study Buddies, Tutoring Drop-in Centres, Super (dedicated) Tutors and Learning Support Workers, as a less expensive alternative to reviewing and re-organising the role of personal tutoring as a separate job in its own right (along with the financial implications for resources of salary, training and time). The case-study college has also orientated towards these alternatives to the 'traditional' dual role of lecturer/personal tutor.

However, the main area that managers of all colleges have been continuously driven to address by successive governments, is that of the wastefulness of student drop-out, particularly with regard to the 16-19 student group (Green 2001, Martinez 1997, 2001). This responsibility has again been firmly placed on the shoulders of the personal tutor, in that colleges have introduced to the individual (1-1) tutorial session, the standardised tasks of attendance-tracking, target-setting, action-planning, progress monitoring, progress-reviewing, and evaluating (Green 2001:11). In addition, via Curriculum 2000, they have introduced to the large group tutorial a programme of 'enrichment opportunities' ostensibly to enhance a student's personal development and skills development, whilst simultaneously attracting funding to the college. This twin-tracked approach within the two main styles of tutorial, are supposedly to keep the students motivated and retained. Whilst it can be argued that this may be the case, the new focus within tutorials is also of major benefit to the organisation in terms of increased government funding, particularly if successful in improving retention rates. Lucas (in Green and Lucas, 1999:55) suggests that "in the process of efficiency savings and convergence designed to drive down unit costs, educational values and concerns with the quality of learning have been replaced by funding and financial considerations". Fertig (2003:3) takes this further, when he argues that "these funding imperatives and the cultural baggage that they have

brought in tow, have had a distinct impact upon the function and nature of tutorial provision within FE colleges". All this might pose the question as to whose needs are being best met by such innovations to tutorial content?

The next section, examines the evolution of the personal tutoring system within the case-study college.

DEVELOPMENT OF A PERSONAL TUTORING SERVICE WITHIN THE CASE-STUDY COLLEGE

In order to outline the development of the tutorial support system within the case-study college, a historical time-line from 1992 to 2003 was created from all available documentation. The areas of interest within this thesis were then selected for closer observation.

With the requirement of both Conservative and New Labour governments for colleges to meet performance criteria in order to attract funding, it is understandable that some areas of college service delivery would develop and improve faster than others, as college management needed to prioritise their spending. Nonetheless, the development of the tutorial support system got off to an early start at the case-study college, when in November 1992, the college made a commitment that all students would have access to a personal tutor. To oversee this development the college created a Tutorial Group, that over the years would revise its aims, change its membership and its title, but which has survived until present times, sometimes aided by cross-curriculum working parties. It is currently known as the Lead Tutors Partnership. Although several attempts have been made by individual members of staff to form a College Research Group, the last attempt being in March 2002, none has been successful. Despite this, management over the years have conducted several surveys in order to establish staff and student opinion in relation to personal tutoring, the first of these being in 1993. The survey was limited in its ambition, but did recommend some important basic quality standards, these being that

every full-time student group should receive a formal induction session, one hour of formal tutorial time each week, and a limited amount of prescribed tutorial content. Personal tutors should have a student caseload restricted to 16 full-time tutees, and be responsible for creating a relaxed, tutorial atmosphere. Nothing further is recorded until the appointment of a new College Principal in 1996, who declared via a newsletter for personal tutors that:

I can see the role of personal tutor as one of the pivotal roles in any college. It is the personal tutor who is the key point of contact for his/her tutor group. I also realise that it is a role which may seem to have no limits". On a spectrum of pure learning at one end, to pure social work at the other, personal tutors need to draw the line somewhere on that spectrum and refer students to other support staff in the college when they need particular help with learning or with personal problems.

This statement identified several key issues for the development of the role of a personal tutor in the case-study college over the ensuing years. Also, following this statement, the development of personal tutoring picked up pace in the college. The first 'Tutor's Handbook' issued in early 1996 was updated in an attempt to define the various elements of a personal tutor's role (academic support, referee to specialist services, and welfare support). Throughout the development of personal tutoring within the case-study college, the 'Tutor's Handbook' has tended to be the vehicle that has reflected emerging policy and practice within the college. This would account for the number of 'updates' over the years, culminating in the current issue (2001-2002) that contains a large number of policies, procedures, guidelines and standardised documentation in order to direct the way in which the role of personal tutor is to be enacted within the college.

TUTORIAL STYLES

The May 1998 formal review of tutorial practice within the college noted

that two main styles of tutorial delivery existed, these being large group tutorials and individual (1-1) tutorials. Since that time, a Drop-in Tutorial Service has been suggested within the Student Services Unit for evening students, and for day students who find evening tutorials more convenient. Staff Development Section advised personal tutors during INSET training in January 2000, that it was acceptable to offer students guidance over the telephone if they were unable to attend college for a tutorial session. As noted earlier, since 2002-2003 the use of e-mail had been regarded by college management as a valid and acceptable method of communication between staff and students, particularly in terms of offering tutorial support.

CONTENT OF TUTORIAL SESSIONS

Following a small-scale piece of research in 1998 by a member of Senior Management, it was noted that the implementation of the tutoring policy and practice was inconsistent across the college and in some cases non-existent. This assertion was repeated by the College Principal in the April 1999 College Newsletter.

As a consequence of these findings, and to ensure that students had equal treatment in terms of tutorial entitlement, the college subsequently from 2001, began to re-invigorate its policy of 'centralising and standardising' its approach to tutoring. The content for the *large group tutorials* was via a large prescriptive list of general topics, that would co-exist with a large amount of general administrative work. In addition, the college produced standardised tutorial resource packs, with teaching materials that included topic handouts, acetates, activity ideas, schemes of work and a yearly programme. Included in this yearly programme via Curriculum 2000 and the attendant government funding, were any 'enrichment opportunities' deemed suitable for a student's personal development such as discussions on drug and alcohol awareness.

The standardised content for the *individual (1-1) tutorials* was very much in line with the government's requirement to address student drop-out rates amongst the 16-19 student group. This consisted of producing a range of standardised forms for managing the student's journey through the course (attendance-tracking, target-setting, action-planning, progress-monitoring, progress-reviewing and course-evaluating)..

These prescribed activities and standardised materials, both of which affected the personal tutor's own working practices within the tutorial sessions, not to mention the student experience, were not put out for consultation with students, staff or the recognised trade union. Further, they were subsequently stated to be mandatory for tutoring practice for all student groups within the college, as witnessed by a memorandum to Lead Tutors in November 2001, and confirmed in a college curriculum policy document in 2002-2003.

TUTORIAL ENTITLEMENT

Availability of tutorial time

Although a college working party in May 1998 recommended that there should be a college commitment to treat all students equally, initially it was only the full-time students (mainly 16-19) who benefited from this recommendation when they were formally awarded one hour, per week, per student group, in the ensuing academic year. It was suggested that part-time students (mainly 19+) were entitled to access tutorial support not from a personal tutor but from the Student Services Section.

In June 2000 a college-wide tutorial review took place, which recommended that the weekly tutorial time for full-time students should be increased from one hour to two hours, and that this be apportioned to one hour for large group tutorials and one hour for private individual tutorials.

With regard to part-time students on courses over five hours duration, the report recommended that they be formally allocated for the first time, one hour per week per student group. Given a notional average class of 20 students, this meant that each student would receive 1.5 hours tutorial time per academic year, or more specifically, 30 minutes per student or term. The content was to be negotiable.

A further recommendation, was that students on short courses (under five hours) should have access to tutorial support via a variety of alternative methods, such as help-lines, drop-in sessions and so forth. These new recommendations were enacted in the immediately following academic year for the full-time students, but were not fully enacted for part-time students. This shortfall, was formally noted later in a college-wide working party report in May 2000, that recommended that all part-time adult students should now be allocated a personal tutor. However, this recommendation was still not fully implemented until after the college received some official criticism from an ALI/OFSTED Inspection Report in May 2003. The 1998 tutoring project report also recommended that personal tutors should be given extra tutorial time in order to support students at annual pressure points such as written-examination time.

Availability of personal tutors

The key element of any ethical practice is the setting of boundaries. The college has made some progress in establishing such boundaries in several areas. As already noted, caseloads of full-time students were officially set in 1993 at a maximum of 16 tutees, thereby in some small way, limiting the availability of the personal tutor. However, a repeated statement by the college that “students will have access to extra informal tutoring ‘as the need arises’ (April 2000), and ‘appropriate to the needs and demands of the course’ (March 2003), still leaves the issue of ‘availability boundaries’ to the individual personal tutor.

Student Agreement

In September 1999 the college produced its first Student Agreement, which contained details of a student's entitlement whilst at college. Since that time, the agreement has been revised regularly in order to reflect ongoing entitlement developments.

Quality Assurance

In order to ensure that students receive 'good practice', the college quality unit issued in June 1999, a set of quality tutorial standards. These were later linked in September 2001, with a formal student complaints procedure. Already in place, was a system of tutorial record-keeping, which had been recommended in May 1998 during a review of tutorial practice, and which was regarded as an essential formal record of tutorial session outcomes.

ROLE OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR

The current Tutor's Handbook (2001-2002) states that "the role of a personal tutor is to oversee and support all aspects of a student's learning experience and to ensure that this support is co-ordinated in a coherent and meaningful manner for each individual student within their tutor group".

Role of the personal tutor in addressing personal problems of students

The working party report of May 1998 suggested that the academic and pastoral aspects of the tutoring role should not be divorced, as it was recognised that the social/emotional well-being is an inseparable part of the students' success in learning and finding a sense of direction.

With particular regard to the provision of 'pastoral support', the current Tutor's Handbook (2002) states that the personal tutor's tasks are to:

- help students to raise personal issues affecting their learning by creating formal and informal opportunities to listen and respond to individuals
- help students access relevant specialist support if required
- know the limits of their own competence in dealing with personal issues
- maintain effective links with colleagues and other professionals to help students resolve personal problems
- advocate and mediate for individuals when problems arise

Boundaries of professional competence to deal with a students' personal problems or when to refer to a specialist worker, were left to the discretion of the personal tutor, via the college statement that "a personal tutor should know the limits of their own competence to deal with personal issues" (September 2002).

Sub-roles of the personal tutor

A working party report of May 1998 also recognised that personal tutors fulfil a variety of sub-roles within their work such as acting as advocates, referee, guide, counsellor and so forth.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR

The Tutor's handbook (2001-2002) outlines the actual duties of a personal tutor as follows:

- responsible for pastoral support and welfare and access to personal support
- manage/co-ordinate student induction programme
- monitor attendance, punctuality and academic progress (referring for additional academic support when necessary)
- assist with basic skills screening and key skills assessment, and

- monitor/review any extra support given
- provide a careers education programme and ensure access to guidance and progression opportunities (*full-time students*)
- provide access to a range of enrichment activities (*full-time students*)
- maintain contact with parents, guardians and employers (*full-time students*)
- provide appropriate mentoring to individual learners

RECRUITMENT OF PERSONAL TUTORS

The role of personal tutoring is subsumed within the employment contract when appointed to the college as a lecturer. Personal Tutor roles are then allocated when the need arises. It was recognised in the Tutorial Review working party report of May 1998 however, that not all lecturers are suitable to the role of personal tutor. The only personal qualities currently nominated are those identified in the Tutorial Review Report (May 2000) of a ‘mutual respect’ and an ‘easy-going personality’.

TRAINING FOR THE ROLE OF PERSONAL TUTOR

Training for tutorial work has focused on the occasional and optional INSET (In-service training) workshops. However, these workshops were not well-supported by staff, with on occasions only two or three applicants from a staff of several hundred lecturers, many of whom were personal tutors. Consequently, in May 1998, a suggestion was made by the Tutoring Project Group, that training for the role of personal tutor should be a standardised programme, rather than by optional attendance at occasional INSET workshops.

The next step in this process was that the Tutor’s Handbook issued three years later in 2001, contained a ‘self-help guide’ to listening skills.

Over the years, a variety of themes have been suggested for inclusion in any proposed future training programmes, such as ‘identifying problems’ and ‘referral skills’ (February 2000), ‘relationship-building’ (May 2002), ‘counselling skills’ and customer care’ (September 2002), ‘group-working’ and, ‘one-to-one’ working’ (January 2003). It was also noted at a staff INSET session in April 2000, that individual tutorials require a different kind of inter-personal skills from group tutorials.

In June 2000, despite a Tutorial Review Survey revealing strong staff support for a formal training programme for personal tutors, this had not materialised by the end of 2003. Neither had any formal training been created for the roles of Lead Tutor, Senior Tutor, Tutor Mentor, Student Peer Mentor, Support Co-ordinator, Super Tutor, or Learning Support Assistant.

Various providers of training have been suggested over the years as an alternative to the staff training section, namely Connexions Section (January 1999), and Student Services Section (May 1998). However, since the Tutorial Review in 2000, any future initiative for training has been placed firmly under the direction of the Lead Tutor Partnership.

Accreditation scheme

In May 1998, the Tutorial Review working party recommended the establishment of a Personal Tutor Accreditation Scheme that would be compulsory for all post-holders. This would consist of attendance on a formal programme of training, and the completion of a portfolio of tutoring practice and experience. The intention being to submit a proposal to the Open College Network, in order to receive accredited status for the programme. At the end of 2003, the proposal had not yet been submitted.

PRACTICE SUPPORT FOR PERSONAL TUTORS

Following a piloting of the role in 1998, the post of Lead Tutor was formally installed within the tutorial support system of the college in October 2000.

This new role amongst other duties, carried with it the dual responsibility to support and monitor individual tutors and their tutorial activity. They also had the responsibility to act as Mentors to newly appointed personal tutors of the *16-19 full-time students*. In October 2000, the post of Senior Tutor (*for full-time students*) was introduced to the college tutorial support system, who in addition to taking over responsibilities from Lead Tutors to act as Mentor to newly appointed personal tutors, was also expected to initiate personal tutor training, to co-ordinate the Lead Tutor Partnership and to initiate research regarding personal tutoring.

THE STUDENT/PERSONAL TUTOR RELATIONSHIP

The importance of the tutorial relationship began to be formally recognised in May 1998, when a college working party report, recommended that personal tutors should be responsible for creating a friendly working atmosphere in their tutorials. The report also noted the importance of regular contact in a relationship, when it recommended that personal tutors should also be involved in teaching the students, or be intimately involved with the course, rather than solely in a tutorial role.

Further promotion of the tutorial relationship was stressed during a Staff Development Workshop in May 2002 when it was argued that there was a “need to focus tutoring on a close relationship”. In addition, a small-scale college survey of personal tutors in May 2003, found that 69% of respondents felt that the tutor/tutee relationship was the paramount and most valued aspect of their role.

Designated tutorial accommodation

One of the key findings in a survey of staff and students in 1993, was the necessity to create a positive atmosphere in which students could learn. In May 1998, Support-Co-ordinators, where they existed, were charged with this task. Since the loss of student base-rooms which often doubled as tutorial rooms, there has been no private facility in college where individual (1-1) tutorials could be held, in order to discuss private matters and guarantee not being heard by other students. However, a review of tutorial practice contained in a college document in May 1998, suggested that with regard to conducting tutorials, the personal tutor should, “ensure the session takes place in a welcoming private place”. A college-wide Adult Learners Survey in May 2000, drew responses from both students and staff, requesting that this matter be addressed. Some three years later in May 2003, a newsletter to senior tutors announced that a single room would be provided at one of the seven sites. This single room would be available for use by all the personal tutors in the college, but by appointment only.

Confidentiality

Regarding matters of confidentiality, the college proposed a set of guidelines in May 1998 and these were issued in December 2004, dealing with matters of child protection, ‘looked after’ children, and students with learning difficulties or disabilities. Also included was the Counselling Service Confidentiality Statement.

Privacy

A question of privacy boundaries arose in 2001, when the college suggested that tutorials be ‘observed’ in terms of Quality Assurance measures. No Observation Guidelines were issued, or any advice on negotiating access to the tutorial sessions.

ADDITIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The case-study college, in addition to its tutorial support system, has developed over the years, an extensive network of additional cross-college student support systems, with the intention that they should complement the role of the personal tutor. These are briefly summarised in Table 1:

Table 1	ADDITIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE AT THE CASE-STUDY COLLEGE
	<u>Learning Support Services</u> Offers extra tutorial support to students with particular learning difficulties and/or disabilities (eg) dyslexia, who may want additional help with their studies
	<u>Study Advice Centre</u> A support service for students who are experiencing difficulties with their coursework (eg) advice on planning and organising their studies including help with assignment writing
	<u>Careers Advice and Guidance Services</u> Offers advice and guidance on career or higher Education opportunities
	<u>Student Union</u> Works closely with the Student Support Services staff, referring students for advice and help
	<u>Connexions</u> Personal Advisors offer confidential help, advice and support to students under 20 years of age, in all aspects of student life and personal life
	<u>Student Support Services</u> Provide help and advice on anything outside the remit of the personal tutor role (eg) struggling at college, problems at home, need to find work, or bored with current experiences. This unit employs several specialist workers, these being: <i>Counselling and Welfare Staff</i> Three full-time and one part-time Counsellor, a Welfare Officer and a student nurse, offer a one-to-one confidential, listening and support service, for students with more complicated problems relating to personal matters or academic issues <i>Chaplaincy</i> A one-to one confidential listening and support service, for students of all faiths, who need help in addressing personal and academic issues <i>Mental Health Facilitator</i> Offers advice and support on mental health matters and where necessary, make referrals to other agencies for specialist support <i>Child care support</i> Two children's Nurseries are available to students with children under school age

ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF TUTORING

During the development of the tutorial support system in the case-study college, a variety of alternative support systems were suggested or piloted within the college documentation. These included the following: Super Tutor, Central Tutoring Service, Ancillary workers, Peer Mentoring, Study Buddies, Welfare Assistant, Learning Support Assistants, Senior Tutors, and Lead Tutors. Some have been implemented and others abandoned as not appropriate to the needs of the students at this particular college.

INTERNAL RESEARCH ON PERSONAL TUTORING

Since incorporation in 1993, there have been five formal college-promoted research projects, and several others instigated either by individuals or their departments. No formal Research Unit exists in the college, but Lead Tutors have a brief to initiate research regarding tutorial development, when necessary.

Summary

As can be seen from the above details, there has been a long-standing commitment by the case-study college and its staff over the years, to establish tutorial support as a key service for students in achieving their learning objectives. This saw the budget allocation rise from 4.6% of the total college budget in 1998/99, to 11.6% in 2002/03. There are no precise figures available for the cost of personal tutoring as a single item, but an estimate would be within a range of 11% to 20% across the various departments. Such an increase in spending on student support, would seem to suggest a strong commitment to helping students to be successful in achieving both personal and academic goals.

Since the early 1990's, other areas for development of the tutorial system have also been identified and progressed, whilst others have received less attention. The areas that have been developed, albeit over long periods of time, include

tutorial entitlement, standardised tutorial resource packs and additional support services. The key areas remaining to be fully developed by the end of 2003 were those of, a recruitment policy, a formal comprehensive training programme, a practice support system, and a tutor accreditation scheme.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH ON PERSONAL TUTORING

The overall purpose of this chapter is to explore and examine documentation that relates to the topic under consideration. This is achieved by undertaking two main tasks. The first task is to examine the usefulness of the current model in terms of meeting the needs of the educational institutions and their students. The second task, is to examine the issues, concerns and tensions that may need to be considered and addressed when formulating any future policies regarding tutorial support provision.

In order to discover what knowledge already existed regarding the topic of ‘personal tutoring in a general further education college’, a thorough and comprehensive search was made of *published literature, research journals, conference papers and research reports*. Although the search was essentially concerned with personal tutoring in general further education, it also included the higher education context. In addition, other linked areas were searched that might make a contribution to understanding and clarifying the personal tutor role, such as counselling, pastoral care, nursing, mentoring and social work.

PUBLISHED LITERATURE

Almost thirty years ago Bramley (1977:128) observed that “there is virtually nothing published on personal tutoring in its own right”. Some fifteen years later Earwaker (1992:56) also commented that “surprisingly, little has been written about tutoring and in particular the one-to-one tutorial”. Both authors were

referring to personal tutoring in *higher education*.

The position is much the same in *general further education*, in that only a few small-scale publications currently exist on the role of a personal tutor. Most of these are focused mainly on group tutoring for the *16-19 full-time students*, and are either somewhat superficial, or outdated in terms of recent political developments, or limited in their vision and focus. References to tutoring in general books concerned with teaching practice, were contained in a few paragraphs or a single chapter, with some containing no reference to personal tutoring whatsoever.

Despite the limited availability of literature on the subject, Earwaker (1992:56) goes on to state, that, “there are other inter-personal encounters, especially professional-lay consultations, which have been quite extensively studied. This work could be relevant to the tutorial in that many of the same issues are present”. Consequently, within this literature review, brief reference will be made where appropriate, to these related disciplines, and to parallel literature concerning those professions who also offer a close, inter-personal, supportive relationship as part of their service provision.

PURPOSE OF TUTORIAL SESSIONS

With regard to the actual purpose of the tutorial session, a review of the literature revealed differing opinions. Despite this, it was possible to place the views into three main groupings: The first group appear to see the primary purpose of the tutorial as *supporting academic teaching* (Biggs 1999:84 and 88), (Bunning 1993:1), (Cotton 1995:44), (Curzon 1997:339-340), (Hart 1996:93), (Jarvis 1995:138), (Reece and Walker 1997:32 and 168-169 and 588), Comments from Reece and Walker suggest that:

the teacher usually sets the student a task and the tutorial is a means of preparing the student for the task, assisting in the process and then

discussing the quality of the learning outcomes. It is essentially a strategy to support and enhance the quality of learning.

(Reece and Walker 1997:168-169)

The second group of authors see the support of *academic teaching combined with personal support* as the primary purpose of a tutorial session (Burdess 1991:17-18), (Castling 1996:110 and 116), (Earwaker 1992:58), (SWAFET 2003:1), and White (1994:27) the latter author stating that “because of its one to one nature, it encourages a dialogue between tutor and student which allows the incorporation of personal matters as they relate to general and specific learning objectives”. Strong support for this combined approach came from Bramley, who dismisses the ‘academic only’ approach as being like the:

idea of a waste-disposal system; all the unwanted, embarrassing, difficult-to-handle ‘rubbish’ can be dispensed with tidily and hygienically, leaving the academic side of the teacher’s work bright and untarnished. If teachers and students cannot get their hands dirty together, what hope is there of any real affinity, or working alliance between them?

(Bramley 1977:29)

The third major grouping is of those authors who see the primary purpose of tutorials as having a *supervisory* aspect, in that the focus will be on goal achievement. (Ashcroft and Foreman-Peck 1994:125), (Daines, Daines and Graham 1993:58), (Minton 1992:139-140), (Phillips and Pugh 2000:111 and 216), (Minton 1991:139-140). The latter author arguing that “tutorials must be cost-effective, contract-based and strongly goal-orientated. Targets or progress need monitoring and recording. Be business-like”.

In reality, and for many personal tutors, all three views may at some time or another be incorporated into a tutorial session, depending on the needs of the student(s) at any particular point in time.

A more contemporary and recent approach to the focus and content of tutorials however, is expressed by Green (2002:23), who suggests that “by nurturing a culture of high expectations and praising success much can be done to build self-esteem”. Hence this focus could be described as one of *‘promoting a student’s self-development’*.

TUTORIAL ENTITLEMENT

Tutorial Agreement

Whilst ‘Learning Contracts’ have been around for some time (Knowles 1986), (Stephenson and Laycock 1993) as a way of formalising and clarifying the ‘working relationship’ between a student and the organisation (as represented by a member of staff acting as agent), they have primarily focused on educational outcomes, and have also relied heavily on the notion of self-directing students.

However, as noted in chapter 5 of this thesis, not all students are capable of being self-directing when embarking on a course of academic study, and may bring with them a whole range of personal and academic barriers to their learning process. Consequently, in addition to the academic support provided within a Learning Contract, they may also require support with their personal functioning, not only as a student, but also as a person. For this reason, it may be appropriate that in addition to a Learning Contract, some if not all students, might benefit from an additional contract in the form of a ‘Tutoring Contract’, which would formally ensure an element of pastoral/welfare support. In this way, both the academic and personal support afforded a student, would be clear and unambiguous to both parties. However, the term ‘contract’ might have to be changed to ‘Agreement’ in view of the legal connotations regarding the word ‘contract’.

When searching the literature for reference to any sort of specific ‘tutorial contract’ between the student and the organisation, only three authors considered

such a notion, these being Jacques (1990:20), Lublin (1987:13), and Phillips and Pugh (2000:111), with the latter stating that “discussing your expectations and hopes for the working relationship between the two of you is of prime importance”.

However, if such a specific tutoring contract is not promoted by the organisation as a working basis for the tutorial role, then this could leave the participants solely dependent on a ‘psychological contract’. Schein, 1980 (cited in Makin, Cooper and Cox 2000:4) describes a psychological contract as an “unwritten set of expectations operating at all times between every member of an organisation and the various managers and others in that organisation”. Makin, Cooper and Cox (2000:5) assert that “the essence of the psychological contract ...is that the expectations concern non-tangible, psychological issues”. Unfortunately, when a contract is purely at this psychological level,

the terms each party understands and agrees to, do not have to be mutual. Typically, two people have somewhat different interpretations of terms. Nonetheless, in each individual psychological contract there is a perception of agreement and mutuality, if not agreement in fact.

(Rousseau 1992:10).

This would suggest that the role of the personal tutor can be left wide open to a variety of interpretations and practices, with diverse levels of input with various students (Bramley 1977:27), (Earwaker 1992:92), (Wheeler and Birtle 1993:23). Thus there could exist a situation whereby both the student and the tutor have a ‘shared understanding’ that support will be provided by the tutor to the student. How, when and if, this will be provided, and in what form, and to what purpose, is left to the two parties to negotiate, if at all? If students have expectations that a tutor will meet certain supportive obligations and then these are not met, Makin, Cooper and Cox (2000:6) argue that it could lead to “a re-assessment of the individuals’ relationship with the organisation”. Thus a consequence of such vague tutorial arrangements, could result in the student quitting the course.

Earwaker provides a useful summary to the situation when he comments that:

clearly a support system which simply pairs a student and a tutor, defines entitlement of time for the student, specifies the minimum commitment for which the tutor is available then leaves it to the two of them to get together as best they can, is hardly likely to be adequate.

(Earwaker 1992:99)

ROLE OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR

Types of approach

Within the literature, many types of 'support' were identified, but they generally fell into the three areas of practical, personal and academic support. Whilst the practical support was widely acknowledged as being provided by central student services within the educational organisation, the latter two types of support currently tend to be the responsibility of the personal tutor. However, a difference of emphasis of role was found amongst the authors in the literature.

Three main views of the role of the personal tutor were found. The first of these could be described as the student-centred approach, whereby the primary task of the personal tutor is one of a *facilitator* in enabling students to eventually take control of their own personal and academic learning and development, including the ability to overcome any barriers to study. In this approach, the role of the personal tutor gradually lessens over time. This view of the role is supported by Lublin (1987:1), Miller (1982:59), Phillips and Pugh (2000:111), and Benson and Skelton (1998:4).

However, another view suggests a task-centred approach, whereby the personal tutor acts as a *manager*, to ensure the central concern is one of meeting the course/organisational requirements. This view is supported by Ashcroft and Foreman Peck (1994:1), Castling (1996:112), and Wheeler and Birtle (1993:4-5).

Wheeler and Birtle (1993:122) also acknowledge the need for a supportive element in personal tutoring, but qualify it by arguing that the “scope of this role varies...and is dependent on a number of factors including the nature and breadth of the student support services within the institution” (1993:5).

This leads to the third view, where the personal tutor is seen as an *agent of care and concern* (Hamblin 1983:2). Support for such a role within an organisation comes from Powell (1999:45), who asserts that “a hallmark of many professions, is that care and concern for clients is paramount”. This third view of tutoring, suggests a process that takes place between two interested parties within the actual tutorial session, whatever the focus or content might be. Of course, depending on the organisation concerned, the role of a personal tutor might embrace to a varying degree, a mixture of all three approaches.

Little material was found on describing tutoring as a concept, with two notable exceptions, one from the USA and one from Britain. American authors Price Moore and Poppino (1983:7) suggest that “tutoring is primarily a close interpersonal relationship, the purpose of which is to help one or both participants succeed in a particularly difficult learning situation”. However, a more recent British attempt (Green 2002:24), argues that “effective tutoring is all about communication. The one-to-one session needs to be a dialogue, where the learner communicates his or her aspirations, success, needs, problems and solutions and the tutor communicates care, interest, enthusiasm and support”.

Role of the personal tutor in addressing personal problems of students

It is evident from the literature reviewed, that a key task of the personal tutor is the ability to deal with problems or barriers to study, presented by the student. However, another key factor to emerge was the importance of the psychological profile of each participant within the tutorial relationship particularly that of the personal tutor. Bramley (1977:47) suggests that “everyone knows of tutors who appear to work around the clock, keeping open-house for 24 hours a day, having students ringing up or dropping in, in the early hours of the morning, often in

acute crisis". Such a situation begs questions of role boundaries and the notion of over-availability. Jacques (1990:15) and Lewis (1984:40) both assert that personal tutors need to be clear when they are available, namely at regular times and not 'all the time'.

A further problem was identified by Bramley (1977:47) in that "many dedicated personal tutors can become over-identified with their students as a result of their own inner needs to be loved, to be indispensable, or to fill a social and/or inter-personal vacuum", a view endorsed by Earwaker (1992:107).

What seems to be suggested by these authors, is that if a member of staff does have unresolved issues of self-worth and begins tutoring a student, who in addition to having the normal initial anxieties of being a student, has a low self-esteem, and low confidence gained from past negative relationship experiences, then this could lead to negative self-attributions by the student, thus possibly leading to a co-dependent relationship, particularly if both parties begin to share confidences about personal problems. Beattie (1989:17) defines co-dependency as "an overwhelming need to control, neglecting ourselves, and focusing on others", in other words, the co-dependent person becomes a 'caretaker'. If a student experiences such a situation, then these "further bad experiences of not being in control are likely to result in learned helplessness" (Gross 1990:428). Such a relationship can lead to both parties having a "difficult time defining where he or she ends and another person begins" (Beattie 1989:166), namely relational boundary problems. Such a situation can be exacerbated because of its 'comfortableness'. Wheeler and Birtle (1993:122) note that "at times of crisis students turn in the first instance to the person with whom they feel most comfortable, who they think will listen to them without judgement". This seems to suggest that a student's 'first port of call' will be to someone with whom they have established a close working relationship. This is usually their personal tutor (Lublin 1987:2), (McMahon 1985:34).

A more positive view of 'sharing' is taken by Earwaker (1992:61, 79), who suggests that both self-disclosure by the personal tutor and 'emotional

ventilation' by the student, can be useful to the relationship, providing they are used sparingly, are controlled, and the personal tutor knows when such ventilation sessions alone, are not enough. Wheeler and Birtle seem to support the view of Earwaker when they state that:

One important aspect of tutoring is that limits should be drawn. Tutors are there to help students with problems, but it is important to remember that they cannot solve these on behalf of students, the task of the tutor is to assist the student in finding their own solution. Some students and tutors have difficulty in accepting this.

(Wheeler and Birtle 1993:166)

Green (2002:50) asserts that "where a learner is keen to discuss personal issues which do not relate to learning, have a strong emotional slant or cause distress, tutors need to feel confident that they know how to guide the learner towards specialist help". Making a referral though, is not a straightforward matter. If tutors find it difficult deciding 'how' to make a referral they may also find it difficult in knowing 'when' to make a referral, "as delayed referrals can be very disturbing for students" (Bramley (1977:47). A further consideration, is that referring to a specialist worker is a key skill, especially if it is perceived that such a referral attracts stigma (Wheeler and Birtle 1993:50), (Benson and Skelton 1998:108), (Bramley 1977:47).

It is at the point of an agreed referral that a further problem is highlighted in the literature in terms of who should actually make the referral? Ideally the student should assume the responsibility and self refer, thus starting to become self-empowering. This view is supported by both Jacques (1990:30) and Earwaker (1992:86). Alternatively, should the personal tutor make the referral, then the issue of boundary limits to confidentiality arises. Wheeler and Birtle (1993:25) offer some guidance on the actual limits of disclosure when making a referral. They state that "the issues of confidentiality need clarification, the tutor emphasising that the degree of confidentiality in personal tutorials is high, although when matters of life or death are involved it may be broken".

A further dimension to protecting confidentiality is raised by Bramley (1977:39) regarding 'record-keeping', when she argues that "despite the fact that so many students share personal problems with tutors, the only information placed in written records of a tutorial should be of an academic nature, and that any personal disclosures should remain un-recorded".

In terms of finding a solution to this problem, Earwaker (1992:75) suggests that "tutors have tended to look to other professions to see how they handle matters of confidentiality, in particular, the influential ideas of pastoral care and counselling". He continues by suggesting that:

A more helpful model might be that of a social worker, who while having an individual caseload, often works closely with colleagues. In the social work context the case conference where a number of professionals share information about a particular case is now quite common. When caseloads are adjusted or when members of the team leave and are replaced, there are relatively straightforward procedures for briefing one's colleagues and passing over the relevant file of information.

(Earwaker 1992:75-76)

As witnessed in the literature, many tensions appear to exist in the area of practice boundaries for personal tutors. Huddleston and Unwin (2002:101), advise that "the teacher-student relationship is therefore a complex and dynamic one and as such, needs to be treated with care". However, a useful advisory comment is provided by Bramley (1977:38) when she argues that "if tutors are to become more skilled in handling personal relationships, then more time and money ought to be available to them to attend training programmes designed to increase understanding of students needs and problems and to make the tutors themselves more aware of their human relationship skills in this area".

RECRUITMENT OF PERSONAL TUTORS

It was apparent from the literature, that recruitment to the role of personal tutor tends to be by conscription rather than by application, the task being regarded by the educational organisation as just another aspect of the lecturing role. Jacques (1990:25) confirms that some establishments “will require all the staff of a department to be personal tutors willy nilly, whether or not they are interested or competent”.

A variety of reasons was offered as to why some staff are resistant to becoming a personal tutor. These are, disinterested, lack of skills, too stressful, work overload, lack of extra rewards, and a feeling of irrelevance in relation to teaching practice (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight 1998:95), (McMahon 1985:30,34), (The Working Group 1993:9), (Wheeler and Birtle 1993:23). Earwaker (1992:48) summarises the position when he states that “it is with reluctance, even distaste with which some teaching staff found themselves being drawn into student’s personal problems, while at the same time, finding it impossible to avoid”.

Bramley however, supports a *holistic* approach to tutoring that includes both *academic* and *personal* issues, when she comments that:

To have one tutor dealing with the head and another dealing with the heart seems to me divisive and anti-growth for staff and students. It is the coming together of feelings and intellect that makes for real education and creates students worthy of the responsible positions many will take up in society.

(Bramley 1977:28)

Wheeler and Birtle (1993:98) support this view when they add that “students do not live in a time capsule while they are studying, and life goes on around them, bringing crises in both their external and internal worlds”.

The matter of dealing with student personal problems raises the issue of cultures and sub-cultures within an educational organisation. Wheeler and Birtle (1993:41) note that “it is a common aspect of British culture to turn away from feelings”. Even for those members of staff who do wish to act as a personal tutor, there may be a sort of semi-resistance in terms of not feeling rewarded, valued, or even supported by the organisation as noted by Bramley (1977:35). Earwaker (1992:50) found similar sentiments amongst staff, who had “the impression that the work to which they were devoting themselves was under-valued by the institution, consistently taken for granted and invariably eclipsed by the publicity given to new initiatives”.

QUALITIES REQUIRED OF A PERSONAL TUTOR

Out of a list of 27 qualities nominated in the literature, only one quality was listed by three key authors, namely, that the tutor should be ‘approachable’ (Benson and Skelton 1998:67), (Kerry and Tollitt-Evans 1992:7), (Lublin 1987:16). Interestingly, this quality does not appear in the list of personal attributes identified by FENTO (1998:10). Further, out of the 19 qualities identified by the FENTO list, only 9 appear on the combined list of the above authors, two of them being empathy and respect. These two are also included by Miller (1982:23), looking towards the qualities required by a counsellor, arguing that the “core conditions of acceptance, respect, appreciation, empathy and authenticity/genuineness are the elements that will influence whether the helping relationship between a student and a tutor is sound”. Other authors argue for the importance of experience (The Working Group 1993:5), (Lewis 1984:61).

Miller further emphasises the importance of personal qualities in terms of being a role model, when he states that:

it is clear that in such a helping role one’s personal qualities are very much ‘on show’ to the students. If an intention is to help students become increasingly aware of their own attitudes and values, inevitably this

process will be mirrored in the need for tutors to do likewise.

Opportunities to reflect on these issues, and to be constructively challenged and confronted, can be helpful in developing such self-awareness.

(Miller 1982:46)

A slightly different perspective is offered by Earwaker who argues that:

we need qualities which have traditionally been defined as ‘moral’, patience, respect for the other, a willingness to put others interests above our own, altruism, caring. He continues: “the traditional relationship, works best when these qualities are dependably present, without them, it may all too easily lapse into some form of exploitation, manipulation, dependency or harassment”.

(Earwaker 1992:67)

SKILLS REQUIRED BY A PERSONAL TUTOR

When searching through the literature as to what should constitute the content of any formal training programme for personal tutors, it is possible to break the suggestions down into three main areas from the authors involved, (Armitage et al.1999:64-65, 89), (Ashcroft and Foreman-Peck 1994:125), (Benson and Skelton 1998:30), (Bramley 1977:119, 120, 122), (Earwaker 1992:83), (FENTO 1998:12), (Gray, Griffin and Nasta 2000:195-197), (Green 2002:25), (Jacques 1990:21-24), (Kerry-Tollitt and Evans 1992:109), (Lewis 1984:43), (Lublin 1987:37), (McMahon 1985:29, 35), (Phillips and Pugh 2000:135), (Miller 1982:32 and 46), (Price Moore and Poppino 1983:vii), (Wheeler and Birtle 1993:32-40).

The first of these areas in order of popular nomination was that of *interacting/listening/counselling skills*, that included the usual range of skills such as congruence (genuineness), empathy, unconditional positive regard

(acceptance) and so forth. The debate regarding personal tutors using counselling/inter-personal skills was discussed in detail in chapter 1.

The second most popular skill nominated was that of having the *ability to assess/analyse information*. Support for personal tutors acquiring assessment skills was found in the literature from Bramley (1977:45), McGivney (1991:117), Earwaker (1992:92), and Rana (2000:120), the latter author stating that “assessment plays a central role in reaching a decision about what subsequent help will be most suitable for an individual student”.

The acquisition of assessment skills by personal tutors would appear to be important in two practice areas. The first area is that of attempting to identify a student’s *motives for entering further education*, as this could have a bearing on any retention strategy conducted by the personal tutor, and secondly in terms of motivating the student to remain on the course. (*Motive* is the *reason*, and *motivation* is the *driver*). One of the difficulties suggested by the authors in identifying student motives is the wide range of motives that abound, and the difficulty some students have in self-identifying their motives for re-entering education (Daines, Daines and Graham 1993:9), (Coare and Thomson 1996:141), (McGivney 1992:15). The motives offered can be grouped into areas, particularly for adult students returning to education following a long interval since formal schooling. These would be, “making up for missed opportunities” (Coare and Thomson 1996:142), as a “preliminary training to a new career” (Rogers J. 1977:15), and obtaining “a new identity and purpose” or, to “be myself again” (Coare and Thomson 1996:144).

The second key area where assessment skills are important is that of assessing *student needs*. Considerable debate was found within the literature, regarding whether the assessment of student needs should be pre-determined by the organisation (*‘top-down’*), by the students (*bottom-up*), or be carried out *jointly* between the student and the personal tutor. (Daines, Daines and Graham 1993:18), (Dewson et al 2000 cited in McGivney 2002:24), (Jude 2003:16), (McGivney 2000:9), (Martinez and Munday 1988:34), (Martinez and Munday

1998:393), (Middleton 1997:7, 9, 11, 20, 53), (Minton 1991:101), (Petty 1998:393), (Rana 2000:131), (Rogers 1977:26). Petty (1998:394) perhaps summarises the debate when he argues that “ideally each student should have their individual needs diagnosed and an individual action plan negotiated and formulated. The course can then adapt, and the student can be shown how to make use of cross-college specialist support, to meet their needs”.

The third most popularly nominated skill within the literature was that of *being able to create a positive tutorial atmosphere*. Here the personal tutor would create positive, relaxed conditions for learning, whereby students would be free to express themselves either academically or emotionally, without fear of ridicule or being dismissed (Bramley 1977:21), (Curzon 1997:126), (Bligh 1986:173), (Price Moore and Poppino 1983:8). Wallace (2001:92) summarises these points usefully, when she states that “a student needs to feel comfortable, physically and emotionally, if she or he is to achieve his or her full potential for learning”. In pursuance of such an atmosphere, several authors make reference to the provision of conducive accommodation as being essential, not least in terms of offering privacy and thereby the protection of confidentiality for the one-to-one tutorial sessions (Jacques 1990:26), (Lublin 1987:10), (McMahon 1985:29).

The remaining skills identified in the literature in terms of popularity were those of *referral skills, feedback skills, staff self-awareness, study/research skills, and tutorial context/styles (1 – 1 or groups)*.

The fact that developing *skills for working in different tutorial styles* (1-1, small-group, large-group, drop-in) commands the least nominations for training from the authors is somewhat surprising, particularly with regard to large group tutorials, as this is the most popular format for those personal tutors working with younger students. Bunning (1993:1) suggests that the popularity of this style, “arose out of the need for a more efficient use of staff”. Nonetheless, Wheeler and Birtle argue that:

While there are occasions when students want and need individual consultations with their tutors, much personal tutoring can be successfully conducted in a group setting. However, to use this approach, personal tutors need to feel comfortable with group facilitation skills.

(Wheeler and Birtle 1993:27)

Bramley (1977:59) picks up this difficulty when she observes that “some tutors find the idea of furthering pastoral aspects of their work in a group situation very threatening indeed”. Such comments from the authors therefore, appear to incidentally identify training in group processes and dynamics as one of the key skills in performing the role of personal tutor.

Of interest, is that the skills listed by FENTO as being relevant to the personal tutoring role, (self-reflection, negotiating, relationship-building, interviewing and group discussions), were not nominated as key skills by any of the main authors who have written about personal tutoring. Other tutorial-relevant skills listed by Benson and Skelton (1998:30) and not FENTO were, agenda-setting, negotiating, motivating, referring, empowering, liaison skills, and record-keeping.

The fact that not much discussion occurred within the literature regarding the record-keeping of tutorial sessions, is somewhat surprising, in that such a record becomes particularly important in the event of any disagreement between the tutor and tutee, or worse, any subsequent litigation. What comment did appear, tended to make important points albeit briefly. Wallace (2001:141) sees record-keeping mainly in terms of evidence of service delivery, whilst Bramley (1977:39), Lewis (1984:53), and Green (2002:38), all see record-keeping very much in terms of facilitating the development of tutoring practice.

TRAINING FOR THE ROLE OF PERSONAL TUTOR

Within the literature reviewed, there exist two views about training personal tutors for their role. Firstly, there is the *informal* view, that tutoring is a complex task, and is best learned ‘on the job’ via the use of professional judgement,

experience and time (Price Moore and Poppino 1983:4). The opposing view, whilst agreeing that tutoring and the tutoring relationship, along with the variety of problems presented, are difficult tasks, argues that staff should not be expected to cope, without some *formal* training input (Earwaker 1992:53), (Phillips and Pugh 2000:197), (The Working Group (1993:9), (Wheeler and Birtle 1993:93). Whichever way expertise might be acquired, both viewpoints acknowledge the necessity for professional back-up staff to be available in the form of practice support arrangements.

PRACTICE SUPPORT FOR PERSONAL TUTORS

When searching the literature for views on practice support for personal tutors, it was clear that most staff experienced ongoing anxiety about their performance as a personal tutor. Earwaker when commenting on his research for his book, states that:

Nearly all of those interviewed expressed some anxiety about this part of their work. Most felt very unsure of themselves in this area and sought reassurance that they were dealing with these matters appropriately. The majority admitted feeling out of their depth at times.

(Earwaker 1992:49)

Wheeler and Birtle (1993:31) confirm such anxieties when they state that “the challenge of dealing with personal problems can be daunting, taking them into unfamiliar territory of a student’s inner experience”. Despite such expressed anxieties, only four authors commented on the support available Bramley (1977:118), Earwaker (1992:50), Jacques (1990:26 and 35) and McMahon (1985:26). They identified a range of options ranging from tutor support groups, to personal mentors, to nothing.

It would appear from the literature, that whilst the counselling model is allowed to linger as a model for tutoring, at least with some staff and management, the support mechanisms of ‘clinical supervision’ regarded as ‘*de rigueur*’ in

counselling and other professions such as social work, remains peripheral to the tutoring service within general further education.

Green summarises the whole area of recruitment, training and support, for staff undertaking the role of personal tutor when she comments:

For *(personal)* tutoring to be successful, regardless of systems and structures in place, we must either recruit *(personal)* tutors with the commitment, experience and skills to be effective in the role, or we must train and support people to evolve into dual teacher/*(personal)* tutor roles
(*My italics*) (Green 2001:1)

THE STUDENT/PERSONAL TUTOR RELATIONSHIP

Several authors within the literature stressed the importance of forming a good tutorial relationship between the student and the personal tutor. Earwaker (1992:81) goes so far as to argue that “relationships are the very stuff of the educational process”. Earwaker (1992:60) further develops his thinking, when he asserts that tutorials “should not be conceived as something the tutor ‘gives’ and the student ‘receives’, but rather as something that ‘happens’ between two people” Phillips and Pugh (2000:12) support this view, even claiming that “once the personal relationship has been well established, all else falls into place”.

(a) *Process*

It was evident from the literature reviewed, that relationships do not just happen; there are essential ingredients that need to be present. A key requisite would seem to be that the student and personal tutor should have *ongoing time together*, in order to work at developing the relationship (Bramley 1977:30), (Phillips and Pugh 2000:15). This belief is also developed by Kerry and Tollitt-Evans (1992:8-9) who add, “all relationships built on trust take time to develop, time so that the parties can get to know one another, can test one another’s reliability and build

up feelings of confidence and security”. This theme of a safe environment is endorsed by Earwaker (1992:68), when he argues that “a good working relationship between tutor and student depends not on intimacy, but on mutual respect and trust, providing a secure framework within which both can get on with their respective tasks of teaching and learning”.

Such a relationship however, does not start with the first tutorial.

Green asserts that:

Tutors begin to build relationships with learners from the time when they first make contact with the college. A tutor who is involved in admission interviews and induction and who shows warmth and respect for individuals will sow seeds that will grow strong relationships. (Green 2002:19)

(b) Benefits

Strong support came from some authors in the literature with regard to the benefits emanating from such a relationship. These were noted as raising student motivation (Wallace 2002:18), and raising confidence and self-esteem (Jacques 1990:16), (Lublin 1987:2). Two further benefits were noted. The first of these was by Kerry and Tollitt-Evans (1992:5) who suggest that student/personal tutor relationships “are about helping students to become established as sensitive adults themselves, able to sustain good relationships of their own with those in authority or with peers”. A final and important benefit was identified by Bramley (1977:24) who adds that “students often have personal difficulties which grossly affect their studies, and unless there is a reasonable relationship with the tutor, such causes of poor academic performance may never surface and the students may fail un-necessarily”.

It is interesting that all the authors highlight the development of a student’s ‘personal functioning’, and the ‘potential for change’ as the main benefits of a good working relationship between student and personal tutor. In view of strong

similarities with social work and counselling who also rely on the relationship process to bring about change; this highlights the need to further define the type of relationship that exists between the student and the personal tutor, not least in terms of status.

Status of the student/personal tutor relationship

Whilst most of the authors in the literature affirm the necessity for students and personal tutors to form a good relationship, such a process is not without its tensions. The main tension appears to be surrounding the level of intimacy. The first view, is that the student and personal tutor are not friends, but that the encounter is one of a *professional working relationship* (Castling 1996:109), (Earwaker 1992:55). This view is usefully summarised by Earwaker (1992:86) when he asserts that “it is important to be clear that friendship with tutees is not what is asked of the tutor and is quite likely to create additional difficulties as a matter of fact. Rather the tutorial relationship needs to be a business-like, working relationship”. Wheeler and Birtle (1993:17) also urge caution about labelling the relationship as one of ‘friends’, suggesting that “for a ‘friend’ role to be successfully adopted it needs to be clearly defined as a special form of friendship in which boundaries and responsibilities are specified”. Such a view is also supported by Phillips and Pugh (2000:12), although they do add that such a close working relationship will depend on the age of the student and the degree to which students can accept such informality (2000:15).

However, it is not only students who might be uncomfortable with such a close working relationship, as noted by Earwaker (1992:51) when he suggests that tutors themselves can be “uncertain how to reconcile the development of a personal relationship with the performance of a professional task”.

Although Phillips and Pugh (2000:40, 169, 108) agree that the relationship is one of friendliness, they also argue that it cannot be equal because it is ever-changing. They add, “your relationship with your supervisor has changed from one in which the supervisor is guiding or directing your work, to one where you are in

control of what you are doing”. This view that the relationship is also a dynamic one, is supported by Minton (1991:139), Reece and Walker (1997:169) and Wheeler and Birtle (1993:24).

RESEARCH JOURNALS

For the period 1993 to 2003, a thorough and comprehensive search was made of 22 research journals that might carry articles related to personal tutoring or other linked areas such as counselling or mentoring. These included journals directly linked to further education, namely, ‘College Research’ (later known as Learning and Skills Research) and ‘The Journal of Further and Higher Education’. No articles were found directly concerning the role of a personal tutor in a general further education college. The only two articles found relating to personal tutoring, were in the ‘nursing’ context. Consequently, I turned to research reports on small-scale projects conducted in general further education colleges under the aegis of the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA - later known as the Learning and Skills Network).

RESEARCH REPORTS

In an effort to clarify and develop student support systems through research, general further education colleges usually have to rely on the use of special funding made available by the government, such as the teachers’ pay initiative, the standards fund and so forth, but by far the largest amount of funding for research comes from the Learning and Skills Development Agency. This in turn can influence the focus of any research undertaken.

During the period 1999 to 2004, the LSDA funded 391 small college-based research projects in the further education sector. Only 38 of these focused on the subject of tutoring/student support. From this 38, 24 were concerned with developing alternative models of tutorial support; whilst of the remaining 14

research projects, 4 specifically addressed the role of centrally based ‘super tutors’, with the remaining 10 research projects addressing the role of the ‘traditional personal tutor’ (dual function of combining teaching and tutoring). Of these 10, 8 were focused on the tutoring needs of the 16-19 student groups whilst the other 2 considered the role of tutoring for adult part-time students, (South East Sussex College, 2002 and Eastleigh College, 2000). Even these latter two projects for adult students were concerned with developing specialist provision of a ‘one-stop shop’, and an evening off-site tutoring service. Both colleges attempted to meet the needs of their adult students by ‘adapting’ tutorial programmes designed for the 16-19 student groups, assuming therefore that they have the same academic and personal support needs. The above summary shows that no research was identified that dealt with the traditional dual-role method of personal tutoring for adult part-time learners.

The following review was constructed from the research reports, by clustering occasional comments from a variety of sources, on several key issues.

TUTORIAL STYLES

Across the research projects, the trend is for *16-19 full-time students* to receive 2 hours a week of formal tutorial time per group, (usually one hour for large group tutorials and one hour for individual (1-1) tutorials) with each group usually consisting of about 20 students. The *19+ part-time students* receive little or no time allocation for tutorials. The reports also show that students generally prefer the individual (1-1) style of tutorial delivery, although this is not always the preferred style of some tutors. Brighton College (1999:5) noted, that staff “attested to their unease when dealing with situations on an individual basis”.

CONTENT OF TUTORIAL SESSIONS

A further tension noted in the research reviewed, was whether or not the content and delivery of tutoring, should remain very much in the control of the personal tutors at the 'local course level' and thus providing a local customised service to meet the unique needs of students and the student groups, or whether a 'centralised standardised' approach should be adopted, in order to offer some consistency of entitlement and approach to all students. The research showed that the latter approach is very much in evidence in colleges. Most colleges within the research reviewed, reported that they had in place, centrally standardised tutorial policies, practice standards (in terms of student tutorial entitlement), tutor handbooks and tutorial teaching materials. In addition, four colleges (Barnfield 2001:10), Basildon (1999:6), Lambeth (1999:5) and Lewisham (2001:7) had also installed 'quality assurance' tutorial session observations in both group and one-to-one contexts.

A somewhat guarded response to adopting a centralised and standardised approach to college tutorial systems came from the research, with several colleges fairly sceptical of its usefulness in terms of the tutor/tutee relationship (Brighton 1999:4), (Havant 2004:6), (Knowsley 1999:5), (Leeds 2001:9), (Norton Radstock 2004:4 and 11), (Rotherham 2002:6), (West Cheshire 1999:9). Enfield College (2000:2) stated that "some of the tutors find meaningful target-setting difficult and remain to be convinced of its value in improving either retention or achievement".

A different approach is suggested by Norton Radstock in terms of a mixed model which acknowledges that:

the varied nature of vocational areas, levels and student profiles means that a single imposed system is unlikely to be appropriate to all tutors. The creation of a system of 'approaches' based on shared values and supported by a handbook offering advice and practical activities would offer an adaptable system, which still gives consistency of approach.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR

The first tension noted in the research was with regard to a personal tutor having to perform two roles simultaneously, namely those of teaching and tutoring, either as a means of increasing contact with the tutorial group or as an economic necessity. This has not always been regarded as helpful, as noted in the research by Martinez (1997:67) when he states that “the distinction between teaching and tutoring is blurred when the teacher is the main and perhaps only, member of staff the student may get to know and is often referred to as the Course Tutor”. A further tension noted in the research was with regard to personal tutors having to support both the academic and personal needs of students. Of the 24 colleges who expressed an opinion, 16 felt that the emphasis should be on both academic and personal matters. South East Sussex College (2002) felt that the main focus should be on pastoral work, whilst Barnfield (2001), Blackpool and Fylde (2002), Brighton (1999), Lakes (2002), Lewisham (2001) and Salford (2000) all felt that the personal tutor should focus mainly on academic matters. Norton Radstock College in their research noted that:

ongoing discussions with tutors revealed continuing difficulty in balancing personal and work-related content. Some tutors felt that supporting young people through difficult times was within their role as a personal tutor, whereas others didn't and preferred to use support services.

(Norton Radstock College 2004-6)

Green (2001:6) in her review of research in colleges adds that “it is important that tutors are competent in dealing with pastoral matters, and know how far they are expected to go in dealing with such issues. They should also know when to refer on to specialist support services”. Martinez and Munday also identified this tension in their research when they state that:

Some tutors feel the emphasis should be on pastoral support, others feel it should be on monitoring of academic progress and a third group feel the focus should be on information giving. Tutorial periods are sometimes used to maintain the national record of achievement.

(Martinez and Munday 1998:96)

Comments from the research reports, note that tutorial provision across the sector and indeed within individual colleges is both varied and inconsistent in its quantity and quality (Basildon College 1999:3), (Brighton College 1999:3), (Doncaster 2000:1), (Green 2001:6), (Lambeth College 1999:3), (Martinez 1997:67), (Martinez and Munday 1998:96), (Norton Radstock College 2004:2), Salford College 2000:8). This confusion is reflected by Doncaster College (2000:3) who state in their research report that “we recognised a misunderstanding of the term ‘personal tutor’ which required clarification”. Northampton College summarises the current position of personal tutoring when they argue in their research report (2001:35) that “in the final analysis, the role of the tutor is many things to many people”. Despite such comments, there seemed to be a general agreement across the research reviewed, regarding the primary role of a ‘traditional’ personal tutor, this being:

- participate in induction of students
- provide personal and/or academic support (locally or centrally in college)
- act as link person to college resources
- facilitate academic/vocational progression

Responsibilities could be summarised as:

- monitoring academic progress (progress reviews, target-setting and action planning)
- monitoring attendance and punctuality
- acting as primary channel of communication (between the individual and the institution)

- problem-solving
- dealing with matters of student self-esteem, low confidence and motivation
- building a professional working relationship

RECRUITMENT OF PERSONAL TUTORS

Recruitment

Basildon College (1996:6) was the only college to directly offer an opinion about a policy of recruiting personal tutors by conscription. They advised that “the college made the mistake of insisting that all teaching staff train and become personal tutors. This was inappropriate as some staff found this uncomfortable and either would not, or could not, comply with college tutoring procedures”. Green (2001:9) in her research on several colleges, also found a reluctance by college staff to add the role of personal tutor to the teaching role for which they had originally been appointed.

TRAINING FOR THE ROLE OF PERSONAL TUTOR

Green (2001:9) commenting on her research within colleges, states that “in institutions where large numbers of teachers carry tutorial responsibility...the need for information, training and support is clear. Tutors need to understand the systems and structures they work with, and to have the information and skills needed to fulfil their role.”

The main skills identified within the research projects reviewed, were skills of organisation, liaison, planning, target-setting, evaluation, team-working communication, and listening skills. The strongest call for the development of inter-personal/counselling, listening skills, coaching and mentoring skills, came from the research projects conducted into the role of the ‘traditional’ personal

tutor, thus enabling them to offer support in the area of personal matters. The colleges involved were Birmingham (2002), Greenhead (1999) and Wisbech (2002) suggesting counselling, Havant (2004) suggesting listening skills, North Hertfordshire (2001) suggesting inter-personal skills, whilst Norton Radstock College (2004) suggested training in coaching and emotional literacy. Only one college (Rotherham (2002) suggested student confidence-building as a training topic.

Generally, no mention was made regarding training personal tutors in ‘academic assessing’, or general ‘needs assessment’ in order to ascertain a students learning and personal needs. The notable exceptions were Blackpool and The Fylde College (2002) and Crawley College (2004) who suggested ‘assessing learner support needs’, Wisbech College (2002) who suggested ‘assessment of academic and individual support needs’ and Greenhead College (1999) who suggested including ‘responsibility for the personal, academic and emotional needs’. The only formal assessment training mentioned amongst the colleges was that of the AI Assessor’s Award (formerly known as D32/33). This enables the holder to assess a student’s competence in the workplace when working towards a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ).

No project report suggested ‘group-work’ in order to facilitate group tutorials, or the skill of record-keeping, particularly with regard to matters of confidentiality. The omission of record-keeping from any suggested training programme is interesting in view of the comments by Northampton College (2001:36) who see it as an important aspect of tutors working with students and other agencies, stating that “sadly this is the necessity of living in a culture of ‘blame’”.

The only colleges who offered staff some training into exploring actual *tutoring issues* were Barnfield (2001), Doncaster (2000), Eastleigh (2004), Kensington and Chelsea (2000), Nelson and Colne (2001), Rotherham (2002) and, North Hertfordshire (2001). The tutoring issues considered were as follows:

- Role of a personal tutor
- Purpose of tutoring
- Tutoring contexts (group and one-to-one)
- Tutorial systems
- Defining tutoring
- Tutorial programme planning

Not all colleges nominated formal skills training as particularly important, relying mainly on '*on the job*' skills development. Interestingly, Isle College, Wisbech (2002:9), relied heavily on offering counselling training as the main skill required.

With diverse opinions existing in the research regarding the role of tutoring, a lack of agreement as to the extent to which support with personal problems should be offered if at all, along with varied opinions on the skills required, it is difficult to locate within the research a formal programme of training that would encompass all these differing factors. Most of the research reports made reference to training, but the content of such training was extremely varied and sometimes vague. However, it was possible to break the suggestions down into several discrete areas, namely:

- Course/College policies, procedures and administration
- Student academic progression
- Student personal development
- Student post-college progression
- Purpose and tasks of tutoring
- Inter-personal/listening skills

THE STUDENT/PERSONAL TUTOR RELATIONSHIP

The overall message from the research reviewed, seemed to be that if the tutor and tutee are allowed sufficient time to build a meaningful relationship and not just meeting to perform the required formal tasks, then this allows the student to develop trust in the tutor and may enable them to disclose further barriers to their learning both at an academic level and also at a personal level. This was particularly noted by the North Birmingham College research report (2002:3) when it stated that “as the course progressed and the relationship developed the students felt they were also able to bring social/personal problems to the support worker as she had established an excellent rapport with them”. A similar view was expressed by Lewes College (1999:2) who commented that “the key issue that we wished to address was finding a bridge between the students life outside college and the influence this was having on their learning programme”. Such a holistic approach was supported in the research by several other colleges (Doncaster College 2000:1), (Greenhead College 1999:2), Knowsley College 1999:5), (Lewes College 1999:2), Sussex Downs College 2002:1), (Tower Hamlets College 2002:6).

A further benefit of establishing a good working tutor/tutee relationship is the part it can play in promoting self-esteem and confidence in a student. This was noted by several colleges who argued that high self-esteem and confidence are crucial to a student being successful, (Lewisham 2001:5), (North Birmingham 2002:2), (Norton Radstock 2004:1), (Sussex Downs 2002:1). This is further emphasised by Greenhead College (1999:3) when they state that “the key to success for students involves good study habits etc., but equally high self-esteem and confidence”. North Birmingham College (2002:3) also add that “we found that consistent and regular contact helps support retention and achievement and develops and promotes self-confidence and independence as it shows care and concern for the students”. Several other reports noted the key importance of the tutor/tutee relationship (Barnfield 2001:9), (Sussex Downs 2002:5) in addition to the college research summarised by Martinez and Munday (1998:96).

Summary of the literature and research reviewed

This chapter has explored via a review of the existing literature, research journals and research reports, the many issues extant within the role of a personal tutor, and in doing so, has exposed some wide variations of opinion regarding current operational practice and the attendant implications for future role development.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY USED IN THE CASE STUDY COLLEGE

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and justify the research methods utilised in my research design. It is important to note, that throughout the period of conducting of my research, I followed as closely as possible the advice contained within the ‘research literature’ and outlined in this chapter, in order to guide my research operations.

The first part of the chapter will outline the focus of the study and seek to explain and justify the choice of research methodology utilised. It will also offer a consideration of ethical research practices embedded in the research. The second part discusses the process of research, whilst the final section addresses the analytical procedures utilised in clarifying, summarising and understanding the data collected. An evaluation of the whole process is located in chapter 6.

DESIGNING THE RESEARCH

According to Kerlinger (1986:279), a research design is “a plan, structure and strategy of investigation so conceived as to obtain answers to research questions or problems. The plan is the complete scheme or programme of the research”.

Kumar (1999:74) adds that a research design has two main functions:-

- to conceptualise an operational plan to undertake the various procedures and tasks required to complete the study

- to ensure that these procedures are adequate to obtain valid, objective and accurate answers to the research questions

To this end, and following a thorough and comprehensive review of the literature on research methodology in order to guide my research operations, I came to the view that the research process is one of ‘linked progression’ through five stages, these being *formative, design, operational, analytical* and *evaluative*.

During the literature review, much terminology emerged that was used interchangeably by the authors, and often given to different parts of the research process (*type, perspective, strategy, technique, approach* and so forth). Consequently, I have identified my own terminology, in order to bring some consistency and clarity to the study.

FORMATIVE STAGE

In this stage, my main task was to define the problem to research. The issues and tensions experienced within my own practice as a personal tutor were outlined in the Introduction. In order to see if mine was an isolated experience, I held informal discussions with other personal tutors, only to find that their perceptions and practice of the role were often quite different to my own. In addition, I also conducted several informal interviews with students and other support staff, (2 x 16-19 full-time students, 2 x 19+ part-time students, College Chaplain, Student Counsellor, Student Liaison Officer, Head of Customer and Student Services), in order to ascertain their perceptions of the tutorial support system within the case-study college. This was to gain a perspective from other stakeholders in the tutorial support system.

Following these informal investigations, I now felt that sufficient material had been collected in order to commence my formal enquiry.

DESIGN STAGE

Choice of type

When considering which *type* of research to conduct, it proved difficult to identify one specific type that would address all of the three research questions posed. Whilst research question 1 seemed to suggest the need for a correlational type of research, question 2 seemed to require a descriptive type. In terms of research question 3, it appeared that an explanatory type of research seemed the most appropriate. Consequently, I decided that the research would *combine three types, correlational, descriptive and explanatory*. Kumar (1999:10) comments that “although theoretically a research study can be classified in one of the above perspectives, in practice, most studies are a combination”. The next task, was deciding which *approach* would accommodate such a combination of research types.

Choice of approach

The management of the college in which the research was conducted had produced, and was seeking to impose, a ‘one fits all’ prescriptive format of student tutorial support, ostensibly to meet the needs of all students, but in fact was geared towards meeting the ‘perceived’ needs of the *16-19 full-time student group*. In view of this position, I felt it was important to utilise a research *approach* that carried the potential to uncover the views, opinions and ‘meanings’ held by all participants within the tutorial support system, namely, management, student support staff, staff training personnel, personal tutors and students. Patton (1990:24) comments that the qualitative approach “provides a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world or that part of the world about which they are talking”. Similar comments have been made by other authors within the research literature (Bryman 1988:61), (Marshall and Rossman 1995:39). A further task was to see if this range of individual meanings would be reconcilable into a whole, which would have some accepted general meaning for

all concerned, thus achieving singularity of purpose to meet the diverse needs of all participants. Such tasks suggest a *qualitative approach*, and this was duly adopted.

Choice of strategy

Kumar (1999:99) defines case study as “an approach to studying a social phenomenon through a thorough analysis of an individual case”. Although the chosen topic of personal tutorials can be situated in both local and national contexts of the further education system, logically in terms of time and practicability my research was located in one place, the college in fact, in which I was teaching. Hence, the unit of analysis was a large general further education college situated in the south of England. According to Stake (1994:237), “different researchers have different purposes for studying cases”. He identifies three types, namely *intrinsic* which reflects the need to gain a better understanding of a particular case, *instrumental* where a particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue, and *collective* where a number of cases are studied in terms of a phenomenon or element. Stake further comments (1996:237), that in an instrumental case study, “the case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role facilitating our understanding of something else”. Therefore my purpose in choosing my own college as the case study was purely *instrumental*, in order to pursue my research focus on the role of a personal tutor in a general further education college. As in any large organisation there exist many factors, issues, relationships, perceptions, viewpoints, conflicts and discrepancies, sometimes above the surface of operations in terms of organisational culture, and sometimes below the surface in terms of sub-cultures, and also within individuals who bring to an organisation their own view of the world in which they exist and function. To be able to penetrate this wide range of collective and individual meanings that individuals and groups bring to an organisation and its purpose, I needed to utilise a research strategy that would identify, clarify and help to create an understanding of how such a wide range of meanings affected the organisation’s service delivery. I also wanted to see if the diverse range of meanings held by groups and individuals could be harmonised

into a whole, in order to inform and develop practice in both my own and perhaps other similar contexts, (see also Adelman 1980:20). After considering all these factors and the range of research strategies available, I decided that an *instrumental case study strategy* would best fit my purpose.

However, there are aspects of a case study strategy that can be criticised. According to Yin (1994:33) the main criticisms appear to be those of *construct validity*, *internal validity*, *external validity* and *reliability*. As internal validity is concerned essentially with explanatory and causal studies, this is not relevant to the case study process presented here. With regard to *construct validity* (sometimes referred to as credibility) Yin (1994:34) argues that this “is especially problematic in case study research”, not least in terms of accurately reflecting events when choosing the operational measures by which the research is to be conducted. I attempted to address this criticism in four different ways, through *triangulation*, *respondent checks*, *informant review*, and *prolonged involvement*.

(a) Construct validity

(i) Triangulation

This is a system of collecting data from either a variety of methods or data sources, thus hopefully providing corroboration (Bryman 1988:47), but which can also carry the opportunity of sometimes yielding different angles on the same issue. It can also to some extent, maximise and minimise the various strengths and weaknesses inherent in each technique. Flick (1992:194, cited in Denzin and Lincoln 1994:27) argues that “the combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study, is best understood then, as a strategy that adds rigour, breadth and depth to any investigation”. To address these points, I chose multiple sources of evidence and multiple data collection techniques.

(ii) Respondent checks

By requesting respondents to check their individual contributions, I therefore afforded them the opportunity to make any amendments they wished, in order to truly reflect their intended contributions.

(iii) Inviting two key informants to review my draft study report

This was in order to challenge any potential areas for misrepresentation or omission that might have been caused by the research design.

(iv) Prolonged involvement

This was achieved by the fact that I had worked within the organisation being studied, for approximately fourteen years, and this had given me an extensive knowledge of the organisational processes at work in the tutorial support system within the college. I do acknowledge however, that prolonged involvement can sometimes ‘anaesthetise’ a participant against identifying any organisational problems. I had also been involved with some of the respondents for over three years in a variety of roles such as course co-ordinator, lecturer and personal tutor, thus having developed a good working relationship with students via a climate of trust and genuineness (honesty), which hopefully obviated the necessity for the students to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear. Such regular contact also helped to address what has come to be known as the ‘Hawthorne Effect’, a psychology experiment whereby workers performed as they believed the person in charge would wish them to perform (Haralambos and Holborn, 1991:705), (O’Donnell M., 1981:36 and 441-442), (O’Donnell G., 1994:15). This effect may be lessened the more the researcher can blend into the background, by establishing a regular presence in the setting.

(b) External validity

In terms of *external validity* (sometimes referred to as generalisability or transferability), Stake (1994) argues that because each case study is a ‘one-off’ (unique) entity, this raises questions about the appropriateness of attempting to ‘generalise’ the findings in a propositional sense to other situations. He further argues that the research should focus on optimising understanding of the single case rather than generalising beyond. However, he does propose a concept of ‘naturalistic generalisation’, whereby, if the case study is rich in field description and interpretation, readers can come to understand the experience of similarities and differences as if he or she had actually experienced them, and on this basis, generalise to their own setting. In this way, researchers and readers can consciously construct knowledge. Yin (1994:36) suggests two key defences to the criticism that you cannot generalise from a case. Firstly, he suggests that critics are confusing surveys with case studies, in that the former rely on *statistical generalisation*, whilst the latter rely on *analytical generalisation* to fit a particular set of results to some broader theory. Secondly, he would ensure that the case chosen, carried *typicality* of other situations, the closer the *typicality* then the better the possibility of generalising/transferring the results of the study to other ‘similar’ settings. Such a usage of typicality (closeness) is supported by Kumar (1999:99), and Scott and Usher (1996:152).

(i) Typicality

When considering *typicality*, most general further education colleges, like the case-study college, have similar student profiles in terms of a *16-19 student group* and a *19+ student group*. They also tend to have similar sub-groupings such as adult women returners, ethnic minorities as well as students with special needs. Further, most colleges cater for full-time and part-time block release groups of students. Most if not all of these colleges provide a tutorial support service for students in addition to any additional learner support systems required. Lecturing staff have clearly identified modes of initial qualifying training schemes and are subject to

uniform quality standards as overseen by government agencies of OFSTED/ALI. All colleges are subjected to the same external government drivers for their funding requirements. This does not mean to say that there will not be local variations both within the student profiles of each college or indeed the occupational needs of their local communities, but there exists a sufficient range of similarities that far outweigh any dis-similarities for the purpose of establishing typicality both in terms of case study selection and choosing sample populations and therefore addressing the criticism that case studies are only useful to the case being researched.

(ii) Persistent observation

In undertaking the tactic of *persistent observation*, I observed reactions to the delivery of tutorial support over the lifetime of the project and was continuously reviewing and refining the service being delivered and my part in the delivery, via informal tutor/tutee discussions. Further, at the commencement of each tutorial session, the content was jointly negotiated to accommodate the needs of both the tutor and tutee.

(c) Reliability

Another of Yin's tests for justifying the quality of the research design is that of *reliability* (repeatability). For Yin, the goal of *reliability* is to minimise the errors and biases that may have occurred in the initial case study operations. In an attempt to establish reliability, I adopted three tactics as suggested by Yin (1994:33). Firstly the tactic of *establishing a research protocol* by accurately recording each activity within the research process; secondly by *establishing a data base* containing reference to all the sources of information both human and documentary; thirdly by adopting the concept of *confirmability*. This "is concerned with judgements and claims about the adequacy and transparency of the research process and the relationship of the role of researcher to that process" (Morgan 1996:77). I addressed this issue in three ways:

(i) Critical friend

For a critical friend, I utilised my line manager PhD, with whom I had worked for 14 years. He read my research study report for any evidence of where my subjectivity may have intruded unhelpfully on the research (although I do recognise that it is not possible to eliminate all subjective considerations).

(ii) Ethical procedures

Ethics are defined as “a set of standards by which a particular group or community decides to regulate its behaviour – to distinguish what is legitimate or acceptable in pursuit of their aims, from what is not” (Flew, 1984:12). This involved me weaving into the research design, elements of ethical principles (see Appendix 1), which were fully enacted as follows:

Ensuring competence and comprehension

With regard to the competence and comprehension to participate, all staff were educated to at least degree level in their own professional occupation, and in addition, all held a professional teaching qualification. The student participants were all following a selection of professional qualification courses at levels 3-4, which involved them having a basic knowledge of research methodologies in order to assist their coursework research projects.

Ensuring voluntarism and availability

All student groups were visited and given a full outline of the research including their involvement should they wish to volunteer to participate. Staff were advised similarly during a weekly Departmental Staff Meeting.

All potential participants were advised that the interviews would take place outside normal college hours, namely lunch-times and at the end of the college day.

Gaining informed consent

Letters were sent to all key staff groups, senior management, middle management and course co-ordinators, explaining the focus and strategy of the research process, making it as transparent as possible and requesting permission for data collection, which was granted in all cases with no conditions attached. Letters were sent to all potential participants (staff and students) again outlining full details of the research and their involvement, and advising of their right to withdraw at any point in the process. Included with this letter was a Reply Slip for them to register their willingness to not only participate, but also for their interviews to be taped.

Protecting privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

The above letters contained full details of how privacy, anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained by using a coding system instead of actual names. They were also advised that entry of their names on documents was purely at their own discretion. Oliver (2003:78) arguably suggests that “one of the principal advantages of anonymity in the dissemination of research is that it encourages objectivity throughout the research process... The anonymity frees them to express their true feelings”. All respondents were advised that the tapes and transcripts would remain in my safekeeping and be viewed only by myself (or my academic supervisor if required), until such time as I had completed my course of study, whereupon they would be erased/destroyed.

“Confidentiality is a means of providing the client with safety and privacy” (Bond 1993:123).

Providing consultation

Each interviewee was sent a verbatim transcript to read (see Appendix 5) and amend if they wished, in order to provide an accurate version of the meanings they had intended to convey. No major alterations were requested by the respondents to the transcripts. Silverman (1993:149) comments that “the aim is to arrive at an agreed transcript, adequate for the purpose”.

The focus group summaries were confirmed at the end of the actual sessions, with no objections as to their accuracy.

All respondents were told that if requested, access would be possible to the final summative report.

Affording courtesy

All data collection exercises were undertaken within the classrooms or staff offices in order to minimise disruption to normal routines and for the participants to feel at ease. All respondents were sent a letter of gratitude for their participation along with a small token gift.

(iii) Reflexivity - Self as an instrument

It was important to reflect on how my previous and current involvement with the respondents in a variety of roles, may have affected the research. Consequently, my final tactic in terms of confirmability referred to earlier, was that of *reflexivity*. Bell and Opie (2002:245) define reflexivity for researchers as “the process of thought and review which involves questioning their understanding and interpretation of their data and the extent to which their own beliefs and values may have influenced their understanding”. Furthermore, Denscombe (1998:240) argues that “there is no prospect of the social researcher achieving an entirely objective

position from which to study the world. This is because the concepts the researcher uses to make sense of the world are also part of that world". Other authors offer similar cautions (Hammersmith and Atkinson 1995:6 and 18), (Mason 1996:6), (Usher 1993:9). From this point of view, it would appear that all a researcher can attempt, is to be aware of the potential for bias and try to identify areas of potential occurrence, in an attempt to understand and minimise the impact on findings.

To this end, I called upon the training and practice of my former 19 years career as a social worker, in that I was careful not to extrapolate for analysis, only those bits of evidence from the data, that would justify any pre-conceived ideas that I might have held about people or situations, as a result of my own value system. In addition, I possess 14 years experience of teaching the subjects of perception, human needs and motivation, self-concept and inter-personal relationships. I also have over 25 years experience of running self-awareness workshops for social workers, nurses and students, helping them to explore their personal value systems and the impact these have on their professional practice. These considerations are important, for as Bryant (1996:112) suggests, "reflection must build upon the competences which practitioners already possess".

As a key part of my reflective practice as a researcher, I maintained what I called my '*Living Reflection Box*' which contained, individual headed sheets of loose paper. These papers were a record of my ongoing thoughts, ideas, hunches and queries which continued to emerge during all stages of the research process. This allowed my reflections to be dynamic and evolutionary, and allowed me to be able to question, review, revise and rewrite my thoughts as the research progressed. Birley and Moreland (1998) suggest that reflection is a three-stage process with a beginning reflection stage, a periodic formative review stage, and an end reflection stage, and this was the format I adopted.

Choice of data collection techniques

The choice of data collection techniques was very much influenced by my own skills, the resources available and the location of the sample population. Three data collection techniques were adopted, all from a qualitative base, namely, *document analysis, focus groups and semi-structured interview*. Whilst the first technique provided a background to the research, it was the focus groups that provided a basis for the formation of questions for the semi-structured interviews. Thus the research design of combining several data-collection techniques allowed me to gain access to a small, but in-depth set of potentially data-rich responses via the technique of semi-structured interviews.

(a) Documentation

Barrat and Cole (1991:77) define documentation as “any material – written or pictorial – which provides you with data for your research”. Whilst I used a literature review to establish the current state of knowledge on personal tutoring, and highlight any attendant issues, concerns, questions or gaps in the knowledge that exists, I also followed the advice of Denscombe (1998:158-159) with regard to data sources, when he suggests that “rather than act as an introduction to the research, they can take on a central role as the actual thing that is to be investigated. In this sense, documents can be treated as a source of data in their own right – in effect an alternative to questionnaires, interviews or observations”. The importance of documents to a research project is supported by Yin (1994:81) when he states that “because of their overall value, documents play an explicit role in any data collection in doing case studies”.

However, May (1997:176) identifies some reservations about the value of documentation when he comments that “what people decide to record, to leave in or take out, is itself informed by decisions which relate to the social, political and economic environment of which they are a part”. It was in an attempt to try and understand such government and organisational processes regarding personal tutoring within my own workplace that I decided to undertake a document review

as my first data collection technique. I undertook this task however with the advice of Yin in mind, when he states that:

For case studies, the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources. Inferences can be made from documents. However, these inferences should be treated only as clues worthy of further investigation rather than as definitive findings, because inferences could later turn out to be false leads.

(Yin 1994:81)

Therefore, it was necessary for me to consider utilising additional techniques of data collection in order to capture a wide range of perspectives on the research topic. The next data collection technique chosen was that of focus groups, to identify at 'grass roots' level, the feelings, thoughts or observations of the recipients of the personal tutorial support service.

(b) Focus Groups

Krueger and Casey (2000:5) describe focus groups as "a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment".

Although "group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments of others" (Anderson 1990:241-242), consensus of opinion is not the primary aim. What is sought, is an enlightenment, illumination and eventually a better understanding of people's views on the chosen topic. In other words, "to exhaust an exploration of the various perspectives held" (Anderson 1990:246).

With regard to the trustworthiness of the data, focus groups follow systematic procedures for data collection, handling and analysis. In terms of content validity, Krueger and Casey (2000:203) argue that "we are coming to the conclusion that validity is over-emphasised in qualitative research. Instead one should concentrate on good practice". Neither is generalisability intended, but an

emphasis is preferred on the transferability of the findings into another environment, whereby subsequent readers can adapt and use the findings if appropriate, for their own purpose. In support of this argument Krueger and Casey state that:

transferability, according to Lincoln and Guba (1989), is parallel to the concept of generalisability, except that it is the receiver (not the sender or the researcher) who decides if the results can be applied to the next situation. The person receiving the research looks over the conditions, situations, and procedures and then decides the degree of fit to the second situation.

(Krueger and Casey 2000:204)

I chose to use focus groups for two reasons. Firstly, my extensive training and experience in group-working techniques, and secondly, in order to use the themes and issues that had emerged within the focus group discussions to facilitate the next chosen technique of *semi-structured interviews*. I hoped that the use of such a technique would not only provide some flexibility when formulating and posing questions, but would also simultaneously offer freedom to the participants to share their feelings, attitudes, opinions, values and beliefs, thus providing more in-depth data than is perhaps possible with other data-collection techniques such as the questionnaire.

(c) Semi-structured Interviews

Cannell and Khan define research interviews as,

a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation.

(Cannell and Khan 1968 cited in Cohen and Mannion 1994:271)

Not only does this offer a broad working definition, but also introduces the notion of the purpose of the research interview. Kvale (1996:105) sees the purpose of interviews as “studying people’s understanding of the meanings in their ‘lived world’ describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world”. By gaining direct access to the perspectives of the researched, the researcher uncovers a rich source of data about the things that cannot be directly observed (attitudes, thoughts, feelings, intentions and beliefs). This is acknowledged by Patton (1990:27) when he states that “qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit”. Consequently, the most powerful argument for the use of the qualitative interview, is its commitment to viewing events, actions, norms, values and so forth, from the perspectives of the people who are being studied, that is, the flexibility to respond from within their own frame of reference. This flexible approach to interviewing can allow an interviewee the opportunity to express themselves in their own way, thus promoting an amount of ownership and thereby empowerment. This significantly distinguishes it from the quantitative questionnaire with its set of ‘fixed’ questions pre-determined by the researcher, and a limited range of answers possible.

I chose semi-structured interviews as opposed to other types of interviewing, to enable me to probe and clarify the responses from the participants thereby giving me some in-depth insights as to why certain elements of the personal tutoring system and the way it was offered, were relevant to their needs or not. Such flexibility and responsiveness in this style of interviewing, also allowed me to close any gaps in the data already collected from the other data collection techniques utilised, as well as allowing the potential for an immediate follow-up and clarification of any issues that arose. For the reasons outlined, the flexibility within a style of semi-structured interviewing can be a strength, but can also be a weakness in its potential to generate a large amount of rich and sometimes unexpected data, which then needs interpreting. However, one of the main reasons why I chose interviewing as my main data collection technique, was because of my extensive training and experience in eliciting and interpreting

large amounts of data from interviews. These interviews also allowed me to adopt a ‘holistic’ approach, in that I was able to access the context within which the research functions, and which may have an influence on the perspectives of the researched, that is, the underlying values, attitudes, norms and multiple perspectives of the ‘community’ in which they exist. Whether I was successful or not, I was heartened by the words of Kumar who reassures researchers that:

No method of data collection will guarantee 100% accurate information. The quality of your information is dependent upon several methodological situations and respondent-related factors and your ability as a researcher lies in either controlling or minimising the effect of these factors in the process of data collection.

(Kumar 1996:125)

Choice of sampling techniques

Czaja and Blair (1996:107) define sampling as the “selection of elements, following prescribed rules, from a defined population”. My choice of population was the Department of Health and Social Care in the college where I worked, thus providing me with easy access to my respondents. An added benefit of this choice, was that all the members of the population were mostly staff qualified in welfare work or students training for welfare work and therefore familiar with the key elements of my study, such as, *motivation, needs, perception, assessment* and *inter-personal relationships*. However, a note of caution also needs to be made, in that the choice of a population that values such elements, particularly the use of ‘relationship’ as a skill of the change agent, could possibly limit the potential for ‘generalising’ to other contexts which do not espouse such elements.

The class registers of students acted as my sampling frames (lists identifying each potential participant within the population) with the students acting as my units of analysis. Almost all the participants were female.

In order that I could obtain the views of key people within the organisation who were involved in policy-making or service delivery, data was also collected from personal tutors, student support staff, staff training personnel, and junior and senior members of management (heads of department, vice principles, principal of the college), (see Table 2 on page 91 for a detailed profile of all participants). A final consideration before selecting my samples was that of sample size. To a large extent, the size of a sample will ultimately depend upon the availability and willingness of population members to participate (Bell, 1993:82), (Allison et al, 1996:51). Other authors in the research methodology literature suggest that it is not possible to advise any specific sample size (Cohen and Manion 1994:89), (Kane 1995:94), (Maykut and Morehouse 1994:62), (Patton 1990:184). Some advice is offered however from Bertaux and Bertaux-Wianne when they suggest that a researcher should:

sample until you reach theory saturation point, that is until you know that you have a picture of what is going on and can generate an appropriate explanation of it. This is the point reached when your data begins to stop telling you anything new about the social process under scrutiny.

(Bertaux and Bertaux Wianne cited in Mason 1996:7)

For the *focus groups* I needed a sample containing participants who were similar to each other in terms of characteristics (homogenous) and who were knowledgeable, articulate, capable of independent thinking, and who would be able to discuss their experiences, opinions and perceptions of the role of a personal tutor. Anderson (1990:243) asserts that “group composition is fundamental to good focus group technology”. With this view in mind, I identified the only advanced course of study that spanned three years at college, and approached two student groups (19+ part-time) who were in their final year of study, and established their willingness to participate. The student’s names were then entered onto separate pieces of paper and randomly drawn from a bowl until the sampling was completed. This procedure had provided me with a combined strategy of *purposive – homogenous- random sampling*.

For the *semi-structured interviews*, I again chose a sample that reflected the homogeneity of their group and who were also capable of articulating their opinions and discussing their experiences. With regard to the *19+ part-time students*, years 1 and 2, all the participants in the population were willing to participate, and as I was seeking a sample of ten units from each homogenous group, the sample was selected via a strategy of a *simple random sampling*. However, with regard to the *16-19 full-time students*, years 1 and 2, there was a reluctance to participate and therefore it was necessary to involve myself and a *key informant* (the Course Co-ordinator) in explaining the involvement required. A sample was obtained of ‘willing’ participants (3 x year 1 students, and 6 x year 2 students), but it was much smaller than I had initially required. This sampling strategy could perhaps be described as simply *purposive sampling* in that the key informant had invited the more articulate and helpful students in the classes to participate. Bell notes such occurrences when she states that:

All researchers are dependent on the goodwill and availability of subjects; and it will probably be difficult for an individual researcher working on a small-scale project to achieve a true random sample. If that proves the case, you may be forced to interview anyone from the total population who is available and willing at the time.

(Bell 1993:126)

With regard to the selection of a sample from the staff of the college for the *semi-structured interviews*, this was done very much under the guidance of the comments by Morse (1986, 1991b, cited in Denzin and Lincoln 1994:228) who stated that “a good informant is one who has the knowledge and experience the researcher requires, has the ability to reflect, is articulate, has the time to be interviewed and is willing to participate in the study”. With these criteria in mind, I identified a range of key personnel from within all strata of the organisation (10 x personal tutors, 2 x student support staff, 6 management staff (3 junior and 3 senior), and 3 staff training personnel). Such a selection strategy is called *purposive connoisseur sampling*.

Table 2

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY
(Semi-structured interview stage only)**Local participants** (at the Case Study College)**Senior managers (n3)**

These included the College Principal who was responsible for transmitting the wishes of the college governors to the management executive for policy formation and execution. He also represented the college at national further education policy forums. Also included was the Vice Principal in charge of curriculum and customer services including student support. During the period of the research the Vice Principal left the College. His successor who had a special interest in personal tutoring, also participated in the research.

Junior managers (n3)

Included in this group were two Heads of Departments (curriculum) and a Lead Tutor responsible for overseeing the work of personal tutors of the 16-19 student group. As such, these staff were responsible for the 'grass roots' implementation of college policies regarding student support.

Staff training personnel (n3)

This group included two members of the teaching staff who were involved in preparing unqualified persons for future roles as lecturers and personal tutors.

Another member of the group was the staff development officer, who was responsible for providing in-service training for staff who wish to develop their skills, including the role of personal tutoring.

Student support staff (n2)

This group included the Head of Student Services who was responsible for the general support of students, such as accommodation and financial support. His role also included having oversight of the work done by Lead Tutors, Senior Tutors, Personal Tutors and the Head of Student Support who was the other member of this group.

Personal Tutors (n10)

This group contained those members of staff who were directly involved in providing both individual and group tutorial support to students. All members of this group were also lecturers.

Students (n29)

This group contained a wide mix of student participants. They were drawn from both the full-time 16-19 age group and from the part-time 19 plus age group. All participants were enrolled on health and social welfare courses and were drawn from first, second and third year student groups. The vast majority of participants were female.

Note:

Not included in the above table, are the four students and four staff who participated in the informal pre-operations interviews, and the eighteen students who participated in the focus groups

OPERATIONAL STAGE

In the earlier sections, I justified the choice of data collection techniques that would inform my data collection process. This process is progressive, in that the results from each technique were analysed (*see later section for discussion of analytical technique used*), and then used to inform the questions contained in the following technique used. What follows in this section, is a description of how each data collection technique was implemented.

Document search

A large amount of documentation exists within the case-study college, from both internal and external sources. Those immediately to hand are the minutes of departmental and team meetings. Reports from the college governors, policies from senior management, or reports from specialist working parties, tend to be issued on a selective basis, usually to heads of department. Those policy documents which have a direct impact on 'grass roots' practice, are always issued direct to the staff concerned, an example being the Tutors Handbook. Copies of documentation from external government agencies are located in the office of the Principal or Vice Principal.

With regard to a large portion of the college documentation obtained, I encountered two problems. The first was one of time-sequencing, in that the college does not have a policy of dating its documentation. This made it very difficult to identify which piece of documentation informed another, or whether it pre-ceded or followed another. Fortunately, because of my length of service, and that of a long-serving head of department, I was able through dialogue, to overcome this difficulty. The second problem was that many documents had been produced by a variety of groups with differing mandates, thus making reconciliation of the resultant range of papers very time-consuming.

Because the college does not have an established research and development section, there was no mechanism for identifying or obtaining access to any

informal research that might have been undertaken, either by course teams or individual practitioners within the college. However, I was able to include two pieces of formal research conducted by the college into personal tutoring. In addition, I included earlier personal, informal research, undertaken with my own students regarding the matter of personal tutoring.

Once all the government and organisational documentation available in the college had been collected, I then formed it into a *Historical Timeline*. This was then used to track the evolutionary process of personal tutoring within the college, particularly in response to government policy, and professional practices elsewhere within general further education.

Focus groups – Single category design (Personal Tutorials)

Having formed views about personal tutoring within the organisation from the informal interviews and the documentation analysed, I then sought to investigate whether via their experiences, these views were shared by the service recipients the students, and/or if other matters of concern existed. I gave the participants (two groups of nine students), a copy of the college tutorial entitlement policy, and also a list of the areas (not the actual questions) that would be covered in the group discussions, and asked them to consider their experiences with reference to these two documents as preparation for the actual discussion sessions. The main problem that emerged was one of trying to ‘moderate’ discussion whilst simultaneously taking notes, albeit the comments were being tape-recorded. Consequently, the conversations on occasions drifted away from the area of immediate debate. The employment of an external moderator would have eliminated this problem.

The sessions were guided by a Questioning Route (see Appendix 2) and the taped discussions were later transferred into typed manuscripts and then analysed for opinions, concerns, themes and any new issues that had emerged. The findings from the focus groups in conjunction with the issues identified during the documentation search, and literature survey, along with my own reflections,

were then utilised to construct Interview Schedules for use in the semi-structured interviews, thus gaining access to more in-depth opinion.

Semi-structured Interviews

I was now ready to utilise my main data collection technique of semi-structured interviews, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions, experiences and concerns of all key participants in the personal tutorial support system. An interview schedule for students was created and 'piloted' with a student who was not part of the sampling frame. Any necessary amendments were duly made in terms of clarity. From this pilot, two new interview schedules were created (see Appendices 3 & 4), with the staff schedule containing slightly different sub-sections to the student schedule.

Once the sample was finally confirmed, the dates and times of interviews were negotiated, and all the participants were sent a list of the interview areas that would be discussed (not the actual questions) in order to assist them in reflecting prior to the actual interviews. The interviews of the students generally lasted for approximately 30 minutes, whilst the interviews with all levels of college staff generally lasted about 45 minutes with one or two exceptions. I drew on my extensive experience of interviewing when posing the standard questions from the pre-prepared Interview Schedules, and allowed the participants to respond 'in their own time', prompting and seeking clarification of meaning as appropriate. If a new item was raised that was not covered by the standard questions, this was also explored.

Two personal tutors (one of whom was a Lead Tutor) did not respond to an invitation to be interviewed. However, all the rest of the college staff and management invited for interview attended. I only had to travel 'off-site' for one interview with a member of staff.

An unexpected problem arose when my former practice as a social worker emerged, causing me to subconsciously believe that I would have a chance at a

later date to follow up any interesting responses. Of course this is often not a possibility with research interviewing, the technique demanding the ability to ‘think on ones feet’. Consequently, I missed a few opportunities to pursue some promising areas of enquiry, which were not identified until later analysis and reflection. Lack of time prevented me from re-interviewing the particular respondents concerned.

ANALYTICAL STAGE

Recording and storing the data

Yin (1994:102) comments that “because different people manage their creatively, intellectual endeavours, and hard work in different ways, there is no right way to go about organising data. Each qualitative analyst must find his or her own process”. With this re-assurance from the research literature, my main consideration in recording the data was to standardise the format as much as possible to facilitate ease of handling. To this end, all data from the focus groups, and semi-structured interviews were recorded on standard A4 size paper, and then stored in a system of labelled A4 file boxes that would allow me to easily retrieve information if necessary.

Prior to storage, all semi-structured interview transcripts were allocated a referenced/index guide, not only to preserve anonymity and confidentiality, but also for ease of reference during the final analytical stage. This reference guide indicated the age group, the year of attendance, the data collection technique and the respondent’s personal number. An example of this referencing is as follows: *A1 – I/1A = adult (19+), first year student, interview technique, respondent’s personal number*. As the interview transcripts were to form the main part of later analysis, three copies of each response were made, one copy for storage, one ‘working copy’ (for reading and making notes), and one copy for labelling themes/topics, cutting and sorting during the analysis stage.

In addition to the above, I continually utilised my 'Living Reflection Box', the content of which was constantly being re-written as my thinking developed, thus allowing me to analyse and clarify my thoughts along the research journey, particularly with regard to exploring alternative explanations for events as they unfurled. This was also my way of stepping back from feeling over-whelmed by the amount of data as it accumulated. It also gave me breathing space where I could reflect on the impact of myself on the research process in terms of potential bias and assumptions. Katz (1987:36-37) refers to such an exercise as *epoche*, which "helps enable the researcher to investigate the phenomenon from a fresh and open view without pre-judgement or imposing meaning too soon". All organisational documentation from the case-study college was also referenced and placed in a labelled file box. Thus I had created an over-arching system of standardised, easily retrievable data, in order to assist me in the data analysis stage.

Analysing the data

Hart (1998:110) asserts that data analysis is the activity of "systematically breaking down something into its constituent parts and describing how they relate to each other – it is not a random dissection but methodical examination". Edwards and Talbot (1997:102-103) take this a stage further however, when they suggest that data analysis is a dynamic process and that "continuous analysis of the data allows you to keep control of the project – to undertake a process of 'progressive focusing' on the most important issues". The notion of progressive focusing was important throughout my research design, in that I had utilised a combination of data collection techniques, with the intention that each successive technique would not only promote the practice of continuous analysis and culling of any redundant data, but would also inform the ensuing technique.

According to authors in the research literature, the use of computers for data analysis is usually reserved for the mass of data gathered by survey questionnaires, although software packages do exist for analysing qualitative data. Apart from the high cost of purchasing a software package and the time-

consuming training involved, there are other arguments against computer analysis:

- “computers are no substitute for thoughtful analysis. The balance is between thoughtful ‘play’ with your data, and mindless number-crunching” (Herbert, 1990:70)
- doing it yourself allows you to keep in touch with the data and be alert to possible connections (Edwards and Talbot 1997:101)
- “it is important not to let the computer (or the software package) determine the form and content of interpretive activity. The emphasis on codes and categories can produce endless variable analyses that fail to take account of important situational and contextual factors”.
(Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:359-360)

However, even when data is analysed ‘by hand’ it is necessary to utilise a system of referencing, coding and classifying in order to control the mass of data collected. To this end I turned to the literature for a ‘method by which I could manually analyse the data collected. This however presented a further problem in that there seemed to be the lack of a standard definitive model within the research literature for taking ‘off the shelf’ analytical techniques, and utilising for the analysis of qualitative data, which would suit my needs. Yin states that:

Unlike statistical analysis, there are few fixed formulas or cookbook recipes to guide the novice. Instead, much depends on an investigator’s own style of rigorous thinking, along with the sufficient presentation of evidence and careful consideration of alternative interpretations.

(Yin 1994:103)

Patton re-enforces the position when he states that:

Because each qualitative study is unique, the analytical approach used will be unique. Because qualitative inquiry depends at every stage on the skills, training, insights and capabilities of the researcher, qualitative analysis ultimately depends on the analytical intellect and style of the analyst.

(Patton 1990:372)

Similar comments are also expressed by Silverman (1993:23), and Miles and Huberman (1984:16). Perhaps the situation is summarised best however by Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996:177), who comment that “the real issue is what works well for you”. In the light of all these views, I adopted an eclectic approach in designing a data analysis strategy from the few literature models available, that would be ‘fit for purpose’ with regard to my own situation. The main thrust of my ‘model’ was based on the concept of progressive ‘content analysis’. Content analysis is a generic term which includes any approach that seeks to analyse either quantitative or qualitative texts for relationships amongst issues, topics, concerns, themes and so forth.

Various definitions of ‘content analysis’ appear within the research literature: (Bryman 1988:12), (Anderson 1990:121), (Patton 1990:381), (Silverman 1993:9-10), (Cohen and Manion 1994:55), (Bouma and Atkinson 1995:97), (Kvale 1996:69), (Hollaway 1997:34-35), (May 1997:173), (Birley and Moreland 1998:72), (Denscombe 1998:167-168). According to Edwards and Talbot (1997:103) “content analysis is based on the assumption that analysis of ‘language in use’ can reveal meanings, priorities, understandings and ways of organising and seeing the world”. With this in mind, the nearest definition of the technique employed in this study is that of May (1997:173), who asserts that content analysis “picks out what is relevant for analysis and pieces it together to create tendencies, sequences, patterns and orders”.

Semi-structured interviews

In order to undertake a content analysis of the semi-structured interview

transcripts, it was first necessary to utilise a coding system/approach that would label the key words and passages within the texts available, thus allowing me to analyse the text in a systematic and quantifiable way. Patton (1990:382) comments that “the purpose of classifying qualitative data for content analysis is to facilitate the search for patterns and themes within a particular setting or across cases”.

In order to carry out this task, I read and re-read the documents, summaries and transcripts from my store of data, and duly labelled each segment with an identifying topic heading. Each of the documents, summaries and transcripts were then subject to being cut up, in order to allow the segments with the same topic labels to be clustered into classified groupings. These classified groupings were then examined in order to see if they could be gathered under a wider category heading, thus again methodically, and progressively focusing the data. Any topic-labelled segments that existed as a lone segment, or a grouping containing only a few segments, that did not appear to readily fit into the larger categories at this stage, were placed in a Reserve Box in case they proved useful at a later stage of the analytic process. Any ‘maverick’ segments or negative instances, were examined in case they identified a topic that I might have initially overlooked in the data collection process. The segments were also checked for ‘robustness’ by searching to see if all participants and groups of participants were represented within the newly formed categories. This process was utilised in one form or another, on data gathered by all the various data collection techniques. Hence, the data had been re-conceptualised via a physical re-organisation into themes and categories.

The final step in the analytical process was one of interpretation. This involved re-examining the data collected, in an attempt to identify any significant thematic essences that might provide an understanding of the focus of the research, and thereby begin to address the research question and sub-questions identified at the start of the study.

EVALUATION STAGE

This stage constituted a review of the research methodology utilised within the implementation of the study, and is contained in chapter 6.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY AND PRESENTATION OF DATA COLLECTED FROM THE CASE STUDY COLLEGE

In view of the word limitation on this thesis, it is only possible to include in this chapter a restricted amount of data from respondents in terms of percentages and quotations.

With regard to *percentages*, respondents tended to individually provide several nominations in response to some questions, (for example when listing the skills of a personal tutor), hence the percentages shown for such questions are indicative of the strength of each nomination emanating from a respondent group as a whole, and not as a percentage of actual participants. Where this occurs, it is duly noted within the text. All the *quotations* presented, have been selected as being generally representative of the views being expressed by respondents on any particular topic.

The ensuing summary of data, is focused on the results of the main data collection technique of interview. All interviews with respondents are authentic. However, in order to preserve anonymity, real names have been substituted with references.

For the sake of brevity, all the 16-19 years old full-time students will be referred to as *16-19 full-time students* and all the part-time students over 19 years of age will be referred to as *19+ part-time students*. In terms of tutorial group sizes, large group tutorials usually consisted of around 20 students, whilst small group tutorials usually had between 5 and 6 participants.

Semi-structured interviews (students and staff)

For both students and staff, it was possible to identify strongly supported themes both within groups and across groups. In addition, there were some significant issues raised by individual students and staff that merited inclusion. Some of the responses occurred and re-occurred in various differing sections, and therefore in an attempt to summarise the data more efficiently and in order to form a clearer picture of what was being conveyed, it was occasionally necessary to transfer responses into a more appropriate section than that in which it had initially occurred.

Further, because some the questions asked of students and staff had either a different emphasis, or extra sub-sections within the same question, it has been necessary for purposes of clarity, to present the two sets of responses separately. Nonetheless, they will be drawn together for the purpose of analysis and discussion in chapter 5.

STUDENT RESPONSES

Research Question 1

What impact have external and internal influences had on the nature of the personal tutorial support offered, in terms of purpose, style, content, and availability?

Because they are not ‘professional educationists’, the focus of this question for the student respondents was placed on describing and commenting on the tutorial support system they actually received.

PURPOSE OF TUTORIAL SESSIONS

Respondents were asked to nominate what they saw as the main purpose of both the large group and individual (1-1) tutorials. A summary of responses is contained in Tables 3 and 4:

Large Group tutorials

Table 3PURPOSE OF LARGE GROUP TUTORIALS NOMINATED BY STUDENTS		
	16-19FT	19+PT
Advising course expectations	29%	48%
Identifying and addressing group problems	29%	19%
Information-giving (College resources etc)	14%	9%
College procedures	14%	5%
Developing new study skills	14%	14%
Exchanging ideas on academic matters	-	5%

NB. The percentages are expressed as percentages of all nominations received, and not as a percentage of participating respondents

Individual (1-1) tutorials

Table 4 PURPOSE OF INDIVIDUAL (1-1) TUTORIALS
NOMINATED BY STUDENTS

	<u>16-19FT</u>	<u>19+PT</u>
Academic progress reviewing	34%	15%
Motivating/encouraging (academic matters)	33%	21%
Advising/guiding (academic matters)	33%	36%
Providing coursework feedback/discussion	-	15%
Promoting student self-confidence	-	9%
Academic skills assessment	-	4%

NB. The percentages are expressed as percentages of all nominations received, and not as a percentage of participating respondents

Additional comment:

A 19+ part-time student commented with regard to the individual (1-1) tutorials:

The tutorials are there for the student to get to know their tutor and vice versa, and for them to know some background knowledge about yourself, where you're coming from, what support you have, so they can support you and advise you in your studies. (A1/I-10)

TUTORIAL STYLES

All student groups described receiving a mixture of large group tutorials and individual (1-1) tutorials. However, it was in the area of operational delivery that a difference was noted between the two student groups. The 16-19 full-time student groups received a weekly obligatory large group tutorial of two hours duration, which was used for a range of activities. Although these activities included large and small group discussions on selected topics from the prescribed standardised college tutorial programme, or sessions of mutual support, they were more often than not, an occasion for the tutor to make a few general announcements, and then see certain individual students for a 'private' tutorial,

albeit, in the presence of other students in the classroom. Those students not receiving an individual tutorial were allowed to perform private work, either in college or at home.

With regard to the *19+ part-time student* groups (first and second year), they were accustomed to receiving the bulk of their tutorial support via a system of individual one-to-one sessions of 30 minutes duration (three sessions each per academic year) by appointment. This was a combination of both obligatory and optional appointments. Only occasionally as necessary, did this group of students receive large group tutorials.

Whilst recognising the usefulness of utilising a range of tutorial styles in supporting student learning, 100% of all student respondents across all groups preferred the individual (1-1) style of tutorial above all other styles.

The large group tutorial style was particularly not valued by 30% of the first year, and 67% of the second year *16-19 full-time students*, as witnessed by the following comments:.

(a) *Privacy needs*

“I don’t really like it in front of people – if its about a bit of my work and she’d say to me about it, and it’s wrong, or something, and if somebody else hears, I don’t like that. I’d rather have a one-to-one”. (Y1/I-3)

(b) *Irrelevant to needs*

“Some group discussions, sometimes went through work that people had missed because they weren’t there, and if you’re a student that’s always there, it can be boring to go over it all again”. (Y2/I-4)

(c) *Waste of time*

You know, you have the group tutorials, and you're all sitting around waiting if you need to (*see her*) individually, and if she's covering something that doesn't apply to you, you've got to sit there and wait. You often had to wait half an hour to an hour, until you get to be seen. (Y2/I-6) (*My italics*)

There was a feeling expressed by 22% of the second year *16-19 full-time students*, that they would like to have the *freedom to opt out* of receiving tutorials altogether should they wish. One *16-19 full-time student* commented: "Maybe ask the group how they wanted to do tutorials and how they wanted to spend them, and if people then don't need that sort of help, then you don't have to come." (Y2/I-5)

Although the college declared an intention to increase the amount of support time available by introducing a Tutorial Drop-in Centre, some students expressed a reluctance to use such a facility. One reason for such reluctance came from a first year *19+ part-time student* when she stated that, "I think they need to know you, you'd be a bit put off going to see somebody you only see at tutorials, I think I'd be put off by that". (A1/I-9)

CONTENT OF TUTORIAL SESSIONS

Students identified a range of content areas covered in both their large group and individual (1-1) tutorial sessions. These nominations are shown in the Tables 5 and 6:

(a) *Large Group Tutorials*

	<u>16-19FT</u>	<u>19+PT</u>
Outlining course expectations	29%	48%
Identifying and addressing group problems	29%	19%
Learning new study skills	14%	14%
Information –giving (including College resources)	14%	9%
College procedures	14%	5%
Exchanging ideas on academic matters	-	5%

NB. The percentages are expressed as percentages of all nominations received, and not as a percentage of participating respondents

(b) *Individual (1-1) Tutorials*

CONTENT OF INDIVIDUAL (1-1) TUTORIALS NOMINATED BY STUDENTS		
	16-19ft	19+PT
Academic progress reviewing	34%	15%
Motivation/encouragement in academic matters	33 %	21%
Advising/guiding/problem-solving (Personal and academic matters)	33%	36%
Providing coursework feedback/academic discussion	-	15%
Promoting student self-confidence	-	9%
Academic skills assessment	-	4%

NB. The percentages are expressed as percentages of all nominations received, and not as a percentage of participating respondents

TUTORIAL ENTITLEMENT

When student respondents were asked to comment on the availability of tutorial support, the responses tended to fall into two areas:

(a) *Availability of tutorial time*

33% of all student respondents complained of insufficient individual (1-1) tutorial time, not only in relation to the appointments system, but also at times of urgent problems. The situation is described by a first year *19+ part-time student* who comments: “The fact that we couldn’t get many tutorials is difficult and causing a problem, and the fact that you basically have to fight for time. It’s a problem, and then that waiting process. I mean, if I’ve got a problem now, I need to see my tutor”. (A1/I-7)

A second year *19+ part-time student* drew attention to another problem, that of tutorial sessions over-running, stating, “I think having one tutorial after another sometimes causes a problem because the tutorials run over, so the second person sometimes does have less time”. (A2/I-9)

(b) *Availability of personal tutors*

Two second year *19+ part-time students* highlighted the difficulty of actually tracking down a personal tutor when they commented:

“Well, that’s been a problem, the last two years I’ve been here, that is the most difficult thing to do, to find somebody”.

(A2/I-2)

“The big one is when you need a tutorial, if you could book it within two to three days, because I found, I’ve rung up, I’ve been to the college, tried to get the tutors outside of class hours and found it difficult, very, very difficult”. (A/2-10)

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions of students, staff and management, regarding the roles, responsibilities, skills and qualities of the personal tutor, particularly with regard to the recruitment and training of personnel?

ROLE OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR

In response to being asked to describe the role of a personal tutor, respondents tended to individually make several nominations, hence the percentages shown are indicative of the strength of support for each nomination, and not as a percentage of actual participating respondents.

The functions nominated, fell into three main areas as follows:

- offering support with both personal and academic problems 53%
- motivating/encouraging/ building student confidence to complete the course 40%*
- being available/acting as a safety net 7%

* (100% of the first year 19+ *part-time student group* nominated this element)

Role of the personal tutor in addressing personal problems of students

90% of all student respondents felt it was acceptable to discuss their *personal and domestic issues* with a personal tutor, if it was impacting on their ability to study. Two second year 19+ *part-time students commented:*

“I think it’s really important, because if someone’s work actually goes down, there must be a reason, and I think if the tutor’s aware of that, then they can help and support in that”. (A1/I-3)

I think with adult students it goes hand-in-hand. I mean we all – I know kids have problems as well - but adults have completely different problems and I think they go hand-in-hand, and I think you have to be prepared to deal with domestic issues as well as academic A2/I-3)

The lowest acknowledgement of this aspect of the personal tutor role (although still significant at 66%) was from the first year *16-19 full-time students*.

One *19+ part-time student* did sound a note of caution however, about disclosing personal problems to personal tutors, when she stated that:

“You need to understand first though, where the (*personal*) tutor stands, whether they’re there just for tutorials, or whether they are there to give you help with personal problems, so you need to know where the boundaries are”. (*My italics*)
(A/I-7)

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR

Respondents tended to individually make several nominations, hence the percentages shown are indicative of the strength of support for each nomination, and not as a percentage of actual respondents.

- | | |
|--|--------|
| • study skills | 45% * |
| • correcting poor work | 28% ** |
| • course administration | 7% |
| • progress-reviewing
(action planning and evaluating) | 3% |

* (70% of the *19+ part-time students* nominated this element)

** (75% of this nomination came from the *19+ part-time students*)

Additional point:

- 17% of all student respondents failed to identify any responsibilities of a personal tutor

QUALITIES REQUIRED OF A PERSONAL TUTOR.

Respondents were asked to nominate the *qualities* needed to act as a personal tutor. Their responses are contained in Table 7:

Approachable/friendly/welcoming/comfortable/nice	24%
Available	16%
Genuine/open/honest	11%
Understanding	8%
Supportive/encouraging/helpful	7%
Not fobbed off/interested in people/wants to be with students	4%
Re-assuring/positive/upbeat/enthusiastic/enjoys course	4%
Reasonable /fair-minded/consistent	4%
Laid back/informal/casual/relaxed	4%
Respectful	3%
Non-judgemental	3%
Not distant/not stand-offish/non-patronising	3%
Sense of humour/happy/jovial	3%
Empathetic	2%
Strong character/ authoritative	2%
Patient in explaining	1%
Vulnerable	1%

NB. The percentages are expressed as a percentage of all nominations received, and not as a percentage of participating respondents

Additional comment:

A first year *19+ part-time student* commented:

I think they have to be very personable, I think a personal tutor has to be very approachable. I think they have to be fair-minded and treat everybody the same and not feel that there's any favouritism at all. Everybody has to feel that they have an equal opportunity (A1/I-1)

SKILLS REQUIRED BY A PERSONAL TUTOR

Respondents were asked to suggest the *skills* needed to act as a personal tutor. Their responses are contained in Table 8:

Table 8 SKILLS REQUIRED BY A PERSONAL TUTOR NOMINATED BY STUDENTS	
Motivating/encouraging/re-assuring skills	36%*
Listening skills	28%
Giving positivity/body language/verbal feedback	12%
Understanding needs	10%
Inter-personal/relationship-building/establishing rapport	4%
Apportioning time for students equally	4%
Good course/subject knowledge	4%
Protecting confidentiality	1%
Experienced as a personal tutor	1%

NB. The percentages are expressed as a percentage of all nominations received, and not as a percentage of participating respondents

* 100% of the first year *19+ part-time student group* nominated this element

Research question 3

What do students, staff, and management, see as the main requirements for the formation and maintenance of a positive working relationship, between a student and a personal tutor?

THE STUDENT/PERSONAL TUTOR RELATIONSHIP

(a) *Process*

When asked to nominate the factors that might have most impact on the formation and maintenance of a good student/personal tutor relationship, the responses could be organised into three areas, the first one being within the remit of personal tutors and the other two within the remit of college management.

(i) Existence of a positive atmosphere

When asked what contributed to creating a positive atmosphere in which a student/personal tutor relationship could develop, the *personal qualities* of the personal tutor received 69% of all nominations whilst the *skills* of the personal tutor received 31% of all nominations. The majority of respondents (97%) across *all the student groups* felt that they had been treated as an equal and with respect during contact with their personal tutor.

(ii) Existence of privacy

The lack of a designated tutorial room in which to conduct tutorial sessions in private, invoked criticism from 100% of student respondents, as represented in the following student comments by two *19+ part-time students*:

I also feel there should be a separate room, a quiet room, where there will be no interruptions for personal tutorials, and that way, it alleviates people interrupting and you get your full time, you know you've that time, it's your time, and no matter what gets said, it's private. You're not going to be interrupted and people are not going to overhear. (A1/I-7)

We could have had a room allocated to us because we were always traipsing around trying to find somewhere to go. We were sat there and the whole class had to move out sometimes, just so you could have private time with the (*personal*) tutor. (*My italics*) (A1/I-9)

(iii) Existence of regular contact, with the same personal tutor

Some students commented on the poor availability and lack of access to personal tutors. This has already been noted earlier in this chapter.

However, a further barrier to forming a tutorial relationship emerged, namely a break in the continuity of personnel, with 30% of the first year respondents and

29% of the second year respondents of the *19+ part-time student groups*, recording that that they had experienced a change of personal tutor after the first term of their academic year. The following comments of a first year student summarise the problems experienced:

To have the main (*personal*) tutor taken out and be told he was no longer our (*personal*) tutor, basically it was a nightmare. Changing a (*personal*) tutor changes the way somebody attacks a problem and when you start getting used to somebody it completely throws you, to go to somebody else and have a completely different viewpoint. It stops your flow, it interrupts the whole cycle, it's very disruptive and it did some damage to the course. I think if we'd been able to keep the first (*personal*) tutor ... then I think a lot of us would have stayed, those who had left would probably have stayed a lot longer, even completed the course.

(*My italics*)

(A/I-7)

(a) *Benefits*

The majority of student respondents (86%) believed that they had benefited from having a good working relationship with their personal tutor, although availability and access sometimes prevented a close working relationship from being formed. The lowest group support (although still significant at 66%), came from the first year *16-19 full-time students*. A first year *19+ part-time student* commented: "I think if you have a good working relationship it only serves to encourage you to work harder and to do better, and to know that if you have a problem, you can discuss it"

(A2/I-10)

The benefits stated to have accrued from the existence of a good student/personal tutor relationship are listed in Table 9:

TABLE 9 BENEFITS OF THE STUDENT/PERSONAL TUTOR RELATIONSHIP NOMINATED BY STUDENTS	
Boosted student's self-esteem	41%
Motivated a student to stay the distance and successfully complete the course	35%
Increased student's confidence to achieve (self-belief)	24%

NB. The percentages are expressed as a percentage of all nominations received and not as a percentage of the participating respondents

Additional comments:

“From the beginning I was still told (*at home*) that I was thick, and here I am, and I’ve finished it with good marks, which has been down to the encouragement of my (*personal*) tutor”.(A2/I-3)

“I think if I hadn’t had a little bit of support, encouragement really, making you believe in yourself, then I don’t think I would have got the results that I got”(A2/I-6)

Additional point:

The two groups who most felt that the student/personal tutor relationship had boosted their self-belief were the first year *16-19 full-time students* (67% of the group) and the second year *19+ part-time students* 60% of the group)

STAFF & MANAGEMENT RESPONSES

Research Question 1

What impact have external and internal influences had on the nature of the personal tutorial support offered, in terms of purpose, style, content, and availability?

EXTERNAL & INTERNAL INFLUENCES ON TUTORIAL PROVISION

When respondents were asked to identify the *major external and internal influences on tutorial provision* within the college, several sources were suggested. With regard to *external influences*, 29% of all respondents nominated the government and its agencies (ALI and FEFC), with 9% nominating the Academic Awarding Bodies. In terms of *internal influences*, 53% of all respondents nominated senior management as having the most influence, with 9% of respondents nominating personal tutors as having the major influence of tutorial provision within the organisation. Of particular note, is that 60% of the *personal tutor respondents* saw senior management as having the most influence on tutorial provision. Interestingly, junior management along with the student group, were not seen as having any significant influence on tutorial provision.

However, one member of the *staff training group* (STP/I-3) felt that in addition to the above nominations, there were also several other internal groups in college competing to influence tutorial provision, these being as follows:

Tutorial Policy Group *versus* Heads of Centres

Heads of Centres *versus* Personal Tutors

Professionals *versus* Managers

He goes on to assert that these tensions have had an effect on service delivery when he states:

I think that there are two tutorial systems in most courses. There's the formal system which is entirely driven by funding. How much tutorial time can formally be allocated depends on money, simple as that. But then there is an informal system. I think in most full-time courses in effect, teachers/lecturers give individual support outside formal classes and they see that as part of their professional responsibility, but because it is not recognised it's always under pressure. (STP/I-3)

The financial pressures from external sources were also the subject of comment from a *senior manager respondent* who stated:

I'm sure in the last few years at colleges, many of us would say we've been far too pre-occupied with budgets and funding cuts and organisational structures and how we do more for less, and I get fed up as a senior manager, as most senior managers do, with being constrained on those sorts of things. (M/I-3)

PURPOSE OF TUTORIAL SESSIONS

Respondents were asked to identify what they thought were the main purposes of the two most frequently used tutorial styles. Their responses are contained in Tables 10 and 11:

Large group Tutorials

Table 10 PURPOSE OF LARGE GROUP TUTORIAL SESSIONS
 NOMINATED BY STAFF & MANAGEMENT

Advising course expectations	15%
Developing group cohesion	15%
Disseminating general information	15%
Outlining College resources	15%
College policies and procedures	9%
Group problem-solving	9%
Progression advice	7%
Topic revision	5%
Personal and social development	5%
Study skills	3%
Course Evaluation	2%

NB. The percentages are expressed as a percentage of all nominations received, and not as a percentage of participating respondents

Individual (1-1) tutorials

Table 11 PURPOSE OF INDIVIDUAL (1-1) TUTORIAL SESSIONS
 NOMINATED BY STAFF & MANAGEMENT

Identify and address any barriers to academic progress <i>(Personal, academic or financial)</i>	32%
Academic progress reviewing (assessing and monitoring) <i>(Target-setting, action-planning, monitoring and reviewing progress, evaluating)</i>	23%
Personal/pastoral and academic support and advice	20%
Personal development (reflection, confidence-building)	8%
Relationship-building/ice-breaking	8%
Ongoing induction/information-giving	7%
Identifying future progression routes (occupational and academic)	2%

NB. The percentages are expressed as a percentage of all nominations received, and not as a percentage of participating respondents

TUTORIAL STYLES

In terms of the styles of tutorials, 20% of all respondents suggested that a range of tutorial styles should be available to students, the employment of which would depend on the characteristics and needs of the student groups. A member of *senior management* (M/I-3) comments: "I think like most learning situations, you don't have one style of learning, you're going to be using different styles for different individuals and different requirements, so it would be a mixture".

A *personal tutor* (PT/I-7) offers a similar comment: "It needs to be a flexible approach. I don't think you can have just one style, you've got to be able to adopt many different styles to suit the needs of the group".

However, when questions were asked about actual operational practice, a different picture emerged, in that 100% of *personal tutor respondents* for the *16-19 full-time student groups* acknowledged that the dominant form of tutorial support for their students was a weekly two hour large group tutorial, along with a few individual tutorials being held within the two hour period if needed. This picture was reversed for the *19+ part-time students* where 100% of the *personal tutor respondents* advised that their students each received one individual (1-1) tutorial of 30 minutes per student per term as their main source of support, with the occasional large group tutorial in place of a lecture when necessary.

Additional points:

- 10% of all staff respondents acknowledged that the most popular style as far as all students were concerned, was the individual one-to-one tutorial, albeit they recognised that most demand for this style came from the *19+ part-time students*.
- 25% of all staff respondents believed that the *16-19 full-time students* saw the large group tutorials as having no relevance to their needs

Despite this recognition by staff, one *personal tutor* who was also a *junior manager* (M/I-1) stated her opposition to any student opting out of her tutorials when she asserted “My students don’t have a choice. It’s part of their course to have tutorials”

In addition to large group and individual (1-1) tutorials, the *staff respondents* also nominated other styles of tutorial support, and these are contained in Table 12.

Table 12		OTHER TUTORIAL STYLES NOMINATED BY STAFF & MANAGEMENT	
Drop-in (Formal) tutorials			43%
Small group tutorials			26%
Telephone tutorials			26%
E-mail tutorials			5%

NB. The percentages are expressed as a percentage of all nominations received, and not as a percentage of the participating respondents

Tutorial Drop-in Centre

A member of the *Student Support Services* (SSS/-2) advised that “Next year (2004) we’re opening a Tutorial Drop-in centre with personal tutors available to part-time students in the evening”. (*My italics*)

A *personal tutor respondent* (PT/I-2) argued however, that a tutorial drop-in service for part-time students was no good, commenting that: “the students, who I don’t know, who I don’t see, who I don’t teach, but just to have a tutor around, just wouldn’t work. You have to have a relationship”. This view, of the necessity for role duality (teacher and personal tutor), was also supported by a *junior manager respondent* (M/I-1) when she argued: “I think someone who’s a personal tutor should actually also teach on the programme and be involved with the students. I don’t think that you can do one without the other, the actual tutorial part without teaching the students”.

Central Pool of Super Tutors

No nominations were received for promoting a centralised style of provision whereby a team of ‘Super Tutors’ would deliver nothing but tutorials to linked student groups, without any teaching contact. However, comment was received from a *senior manager* (M/-3) rejecting such a system, when he advised: “We’ve flirted with the idea (*Super Tutors*), but we’ve never gone there with this college. ..I’m not attracted to that model”. (*My italics*)

CONTENT OF TUTORIAL SESSIONS

With regard to the *content of the various styles of tutorials*, nominations were received from respondents for both large group and individual (1-1) tutorials. A summary of the nominations for each style is contained in Table 13:

Table 13		CONTENT OF TUTORIAL SESSIONS NOMINATED BY STAFF & MANAGEMENT	
<u>LARGE GROUP TUTORIALS</u>			
Activities/Guest speakers/discussion			31%
Course expectations/Course administration			17%
Group trouble-shooting/Mutual support/Sharing ideas/Team-building			17%
General information-giving			13%
Study skills			9%
College procedures			9%
Careers advice			4%
 <u>INDIVIDUAL (1-1) TUTORIALS</u>			
Identifying and addressing barriers to study			50%
Academic progress reviewing (target-setting/action-planning/evaluating)			42%
Academic guidance/coursework feedback			6%
Personal development			2%

NB. The percentages are expressed as a percentage of all nominations received, and not as a percentage of the participating respondents

In tandem with the above ‘content’ nominations, there emerged some differing opinions about the introduction of a prescribed, centralised and standardised, approach and format to the tutorial sessions, with some respondents being in

favour and some being against such a practice. The following comments represent a range of opinions:

I think this college has spent a lot of time looking at tutorial systems, preparing tutorial packs, resources, materials to be used. We do need an input, an appropriate input...we shouldn't slate it, we should be saying you know, everybody has to do this, so week 2 is always X, week 6 is always Y, and yes, if we don't have something like that, some tutors will be floundering in terms of how we use the time. We would have a basic statement that says that the tutorial system should provide a certain list of things for students, and in my view, they would be levels of personal support, levels of target-setting, review and action planning, levels of helping with study skills and learning techniques, levels of progression and what next for this careers advice, higher education advice. I could list others, but these are the ones that come to mind as things on that menu you would want to make sure everybody had in some way. (M/I-3)

There are some tutors who don't value tutorials and therefore the college is responsible to set up the agenda – to say, this is important and these are the things you ought to do. You need the central support and central emphasis. There have been examples in the past, particularly in the technical departments, and engineering and construction, catering etc., where there was a view that tutorials were of no value whatsoever. (M/I-4)

I am a little nervous about the standardised tutorial process. I appreciate all the reasons why we want to go down that route, but it goes back again to funding bodies and so on and so forth. Saying that we are going to have a single standardised system for the whole college because it will satisfy the Inspector or the Learning and Skills Council, well, I am sorry but the Learning and Skills Council Inspectorate should get off our backs and let us do the job. They should judge us by what we produce, not by

the system that we use to get them there. If we are delivering, they should let us get on with how we as professionals can make the best judgements of how we do it (STP/I-3)

Tutorial procedures are laid down by somebody else. We don't decide what they are (*topics*) , you may have your own slant, but you are actually told – you will include this, you will include that, you will cover this area, you will talk about careers, you will do a bit of personal education. The management are actually telling you how to manage your (*tutorial*) programme, rather than allowing them (*students*) to say what they would like to do. (*My italics*) (PT/I-2)

Students are individuals and they all come with different problems, and there are things such as the academic support in tracking them and monitoring their academic progress that could be standard. But what individuals bring to you, you've got to go with what they bring you. (SSS/I-2)

“If we look at the way the government's going on, or the Funding Council, or the Inspectorate and so on, there's an expectation of things that ought to be there...so sometimes the agenda is partly run by the Inspection Service or whatever”. (SSS/I-2)

Additional point:

- 83% of management respondents and 30% of personal tutors favoured a prescribed standardised approach to tutorials

TUTORIAL ENTITLEMENT

When respondents were asked to comment on the availability of tutorial support, the responses tended to fall into two areas:

(a) Availability of tutorial time

One Lead Tutor advised that:

Full-time students have 2 hours a week on their timetable which sounds quite a lot in fact, but if we're giving one hour to group tutorials and one hour to individual tutorials, it really leaves nothing else to do all the peripheral things. I think a personal tutor doesn't have the amount of time they require. (PT/I-6)

Special factors related to 19+ part-time students

Differences were noted between *16-19 full-time students* and *19+ part-time students*, in that forming a tutorial relationship with *19+ part-time students* was allegedly more intense and difficult for the following reasons:

"They often came to college self-conscious and nervous because of their long absence from formal education". (SSS/I-2)

"They also tend to bring with them more personal baggage than the younger students and they need a lot of help and encouragement to develop and flourish". (SSS/I-2)

Obviously on a full-time course...there are more opportunities to develop the relationship with tutors. So on a part-time course ...the students are only occasionally engaged with the college and the tutors, therefore there is very little time to develop this relationship (STP/I-3)

(b) Availability of personal tutors

A personal tutor expressed concern about the perceptions of students, regarding the availability of personal tutors:

I will probably give them more time than I should do as a tutor, with their personal problems anyway, and it's not just individual tutorial appointments or in the corridor it's just, "Can I have a word with you, have you got a minute?" That's when they tend to catch you with their personal problems. (PT/I-2).

A member of the *staff training personnel* (STP/I-1) confirms this workload tension when he suggests: "There is an assumption that the tutor is always there for them, wherever they are, they can catch the tutor in the corridor, and that the tutor has got to stop and deal with the problem".

A *personal tutor* (PT/-8) argued that boundaries need to be set:

It's not good to feel you can never actually get away from the students, if you need to be getting on with other things. So it's from the beginning, saying to them when you've got the time available, and getting them to try and utilise these times, but obviously, if something urgent crops up to help them to understand how they can get in touch with you.

Two *personal tutors* described how they dealt with requests for attention outside the formal tutorial times:

It can feel a strain at times because we've got things to do and we've always got to be somewhere else, but what I try to do, is very quickly assess whether the student's situation is a real urgent one and then assess whether I can deal with it in a small way at that time, or I'll make an alternative arrangement and I always keep my diary with me. (PT/I-6)

I actually think that I should be available whenever I'm here. If I'm here and am working and I'm not actually teaching, if it means I give up a coffee break, or it means I give up a lunch break, I will do that. If I'm here and a student wants me, sometimes I am able to put my foot down and say 'No, sorry, I'm just about to have my lunch. (PT/I-2)

A *senior management respondent* (M/I-3) however, urged caution against personal tutors being too available, stating that “the 24 hour a day, 7 days a week tutorial service you could argue would be the ideal – I’m on call whenever you need me. Now, we couldn’t do that, we wouldn’t want to do that”.

The majority of respondents (86%) felt that the personal tutor should only be available to students in the *formally allocated tutorial time slots within the course timetable*, although 83% of these respondents would also allow extra ‘ad hoc’ tutorial time if it was to deal with an urgent student crisis.

Advising students as to how they can leave messages when a personal tutor is working on another college site, was regarded as particularly important by a member of the *staff training personnel* (STP/I-3) who commented: “Every staff room should have an answer-phone, Every staff room should have at least one computer that is accessible to external mail”.

A member of the *staff training personnel* (STP/I-2) suggested that a possible way of sharing out the existing tutorial time more equitably, was to establish a transferable tutorial voucher system, whereby students themselves would allocate the vouchers to one another on a needs basis, with the lesser needy donating their vouchers to the more needy. “I’ve got this thing about vouchers. I think the one way you could do it in terms of equal opps is to give students tutorial vouchers”.

A *senior manager* (M/I-2) summarised the position when he argued that “It goes back to the ‘contract’ issue, that the role of the (*personal*) tutor is not made clear to the learner and therefore the learner doesn’t know how to use their personal tutor to the best effect” (*My italics*)

Additional point:

- 62% of respondents argued for more tutorial time to be allocated to all student groups.

Research question 2

What are the perceptions of students, staff and management, regarding the roles, responsibilities, skills and qualities of the personal tutor, particularly with regard to the recruitment and training of personnel?

ROLE OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR

Respondents often nominated more than one role, hence the following figures are presented as a percentage of all nominations received and not as a percentage of participating respondents-

To support the ‘whole person’ to succeed on a course of study, enabling the student to get the most benefit from the time at college	50%
To be aware of college products and services in order to address learning barriers	26%
To conduct the whole student experience	24%

Below are some comments from those staff nominating a ‘whole person’ approach to the role:

It’s about supporting them in every area, giving an holistic approach if you like., not only in terms of monitoring their academic progress and encouraging them, but also giving them any pastoral support they might need with issues that affect them outside their course of study. (PT/I-6)

“I think the personal tutor is not just about managing the academic studies of the student. I think it’s about providing support to all the other aspects of the person that may block or enhance a person’s learning”. (M/I-2)

You’re their mentor for their academic and personal well-being, so although I think the academic should come first, because that’s what we’re here for, but we do know, those of us teaching, that unless the

personal side and the emotional side is satisfactory to the student, then their learning abilities will suffer. (PT/I-9)

“There is no point in delivering the entire syllabus to a group of people who are failing. If you cover the content and a third of the class leaves because you don’t deal with personal problems, you’ve only taught two thirds of the people”.

(STP/I-3)

Additional point:

- 10% of respondents suggested that staff were unclear about the role and responsibilities of a personal tutor, and a further, 20% suggested that students were similarly unclear.

A member of *staff training personnel* comments on this situation:

There are other issues which are to do with the way the personal tutor has presented the tutorial to the students and there aren’t clear understandings and expectations about the role of the tutorial system, maybe because the tutor themselves doesn’t have a clear understanding from their point of view or maybe the head of the school or a line manager has set a different context, where the tutor’s role is more of an administrative role or function. (STP/I-1)

Another member of *staff training personnel* offered another reason why some students may be unclear about the role of a personal tutor:

I think the problem with Induction is it is too much information which is not relevant to what people are coming for. So you can give people a load of information at Induction but they won’t take it in, they won’t relate it to their understanding of the course until it has some relevance for them. So until there is an issue for them to relate to, they won’t think about what the role of the tutor is. (STP/I-3)

Role of the personal tutor in addressing personal problems of students

However, when respondents were asked to comment as to how far they would become personally involved in helping to address personal and domestic problems disclosed by a student, and at what stage would they refer to a specialist worker if deemed appropriate, a variety of responses was received.

(a) Extent of involvement by personal tutor

Whilst 10% of respondents felt that personal tutors should not be involved with a student's personal problems whatsoever, 90% of respondents agreed that personal tutors should be involved in addressing a student's personal problems if it was affecting their ability to learn. However, there was some difference of opinion as to the degree of help afforded, to what level and for how long. 78% of the respondents who were willing to help, stated that they were only prepared to offer an initial listening ear, or listen for long enough to identify the cause of the problem, identify possible solutions, and identify sources of help. The other 22% stated that they were willing to help personally as far as possible, but only within their abilities and time available.

What two members of *management respondents* were keen to highlight was that personal tutors are not social workers. A *senior manager* (M/I-3) stated that "I am not your social worker and I'm not your parent. I am a teacher here, teaching you how to succeed". This view was supported by a member of *junior management* who added that:

We are not social workers, we are not counsellors. If you go to a social worker or if you go to a psychotherapist as a private individual, you will be going for very specific personal problem that you want help with. If you come to college and you want to learn something and you want to gain a qualification, then that is what we are here for. (M/I-6).

Within the responses, several factors emerged which it was felt would affect the timing of any necessary referral. These factors are contained in Table 21.

(b) Referring students for specialist help

The reasons affecting the timing of a referral by staff are contained in Table 15:

Table 14 REASONS AFFECTING THE TIMING OF A REFERRAL FOR SPECIALIST STUDENT SUPPORT <i>NOMINATED BY STAFF & MANAGEMENT</i>	
Training that had been received by the personal tutor	29%
Knowledge, skills and previous experience of the personal tutor	29%
Time available	14%
Seriousness and urgency of the problem presented	12%
Quality of the student/personal tutor relationship	7%
Inclination of personal tutor to become personally involved or not	5%
Personal tutor feeling 'out of their depth'	2%
Intuition of personal tutor that more specialist support was definitely necessary	2%

NB. The percentages are expressed as a percentage of all nominations received, and not as a percentage of participating respondents

Staff recognised however, that there may be some resistance by students in being referred, as witnessed by the following comments from a junior manager and two personal tutors:

“The students aren’t always prepared to go and talk to somebody else, you are their ‘first port of call’.

(M/I-4)

“It’s being pushed all the time and that’s how it should be, that the first port of call should be the personal tutor”.

(PT/I-2)

“The thing is you can’t make students go and see someone else, and it could well be the reason that they’re talking to you is because they have built up this relationship and they do trust you”. (PT/I-1)

Sub-Roles of the personal tutor

In addition to the primary roles of the personal tutor identified, respondents also nominated a variety of sub-roles. These are listed in Table 14:

Table 15 SUB-ROLES OF A PERSONAL TUTOR NOMINATED BY STAFF & MANAGEMENT	
Adviser/informer/clarifier/mentor/guide/feedback-provider	13%
Helper/supporter/carer/social worker	13%
Disciplinarian /boundary-setter/authority figure/director/parent (16-19 students)	13%
Monitor/reviewer/progress-chaser/evaluator	12%
Referrer/liaison-person/negotiator	9%
Listener/communicator	7%
Administrator/record-keeper/organiser/co-ordinator	6%
Motivator/driver	6%
Assessor (needs and resources - personal and academic)	6%
Friend/confidant	4%
Group-worker/Team-worker	3%
1 st port of call/referral point	3%
Facilitator/inductor	2%
Activity organiser	1%
Working partner	1%
Teacher/expert	1%

NB. The percentages are expressed as a percentage of all nominations received, and not as a percentage of participating respondents

Additional point:

- 70% of the nominations for the role of *advisor etc*, and 59% of the group nominating the other top role of *helper etc.*, came from the *personal tutor respondents*

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR

Respondents were asked to identify the responsibilities of a personal tutor. These are listed in Table 16:

Table 16 RESPONSIBILITIES OF PERSONAL TUTORS NOMINATED BY STAFF & MANAGEMENT	
Pastoral duties/dealing with personal issues	16%
Progress reviewing/target-setting/evaluating	12%
Assessing needs and resources (personal and academic)	11%
Referring for extra or specialist support	9%
Setting boundaries	8%
Administration/record-keeping/information-giving	6%
Motivating to 'stay the distance'	6%
Being available/giving tutorials	5%
Promoting student self-confidence/esteem/personal development	4%
Acting as quasi-parent/critical friend	3%
Advising students on career/academic progression	3%
Facilitating staff team-working (Intra and inter)	3%
Establishing group cohesion (students)	1%
Empowering students	1%
Inducting students to the course	1%
Liaising with employers/parents	1%
Getting to know student as a whole person	1%
Monitoring attendance and punctuality	1%
Organising study skills training	1%
Promoting student self-help groups	1%
Creating a positive learning atmosphere	1%
Dealing with personality clashes (staff and students)	1%
Supervising coursework submissions	1%
Giving coursework feedback	1%
Organising and monitoring work experience placements	1%

NB. The percentages are expressed as a percentage of all nominations received, and not percentages of participating respondents

Additional points:

- In terms of pastoral work, this was nominated by 28% of actual *management respondents* and 61% of actual *personal tutor respondents*.
- With regard to progress-reviewing etc, this was nominated by 49% of actual *management respondents* and 29% of actual *personal tutor respondents*.

RECRUITMENT OF PERSONAL TUTORS

76% of respondents offered a variety of comments on the recruitment of staff to the personal tutor role. 62% suggested that the recruitment of staff should be by selection, whilst 5% felt it should be by conscription.

Some comment was received in terms of role differentiation, with 19% of respondents believing that a separate job description should be created for the role of a personal tutor, different from that of a lecturer (subject tutor). 10% of all respondents felt that such a separate role should carry extra rewards.

Difficulties of introducing a system of recruitment by application were noted, as witnessed by the following comments:

A senior manager (M/I-3) commented: "I also recognise that there are some people in the profession who find personal tutoring difficult and it may be that we should acknowledge that".

A member of the student support staff (SSS/I-1) noted a further hindrance to recruitment as being, the lack of full commitment by some college staff to a system of personal tutoring, and where such a commitment did exist, it was of a "disparate nature and varying quality". This area of recruitment difficulty was developed by a by a junior manager when she commented:

In those areas of sub-culture where maybe there was no tradition, I mean if you take Health and Social Care, and Drama, and some of the A-Level areas, there is a tradition of regarding it (personal tutoring) as very significant and important. If you take engineering, construction and catering, then you have got maybe some examples of places, where it was not regarded as important.
(My italics) (M/I-4)

A member of the staff training personnel summarised a possible way forward when he argued that:

It shouldn't be automatically assumed that someone can be a tutor, they need to be selected properly on the basis of a job description, and then they also need to be trained in some of the systems that they will need to administer, and in some areas they may need to develop personal skills and attributes that might require changes in behaviour and attitudes to make them a rounded tutor. (STP/I-1)

QUALITIES REQUIRED OF A PERSONAL TUTOR

Respondents were asked to nominate the *qualities* needed to act as a personal tutor. Their responses are contained in Table 17:

Table 17 QUALITIES REQUIRED OF A PERSONAL TUTOR NOMINATED BY STAFF & MANAGEMENT	
Approachable/friendly/comfortable/rapport	13%
Honest/open/straight	11%
Respectful/tactful/non-patronising	9%
Trustworthy	7%
Empathetic/sensitive	6%
Organised/in control/firm/direct/confident	6%
Available/accessible/time-giving	5%
Dependable/committed/reliable keeps promises	5%
Supportive/encouraging	4%
Patient/extra mile	4%
Maintains professional boundaries	4%
Non-judgemental/fair/objective	4%
Positive/enthusiastic/enjoys work/interested/involved	4%
Respects confidentiality (with limits)	3%
Relaxed/calm/does not over-react/re-assuring	2%
Progressive/purposive/focused/clarity of thought	2%
Sense of humour	2%
Sympathetic	2%
Understanding/Tolerant	2%
Helpful/kind	1%
Caring	1%
Humility	1%
Knowledgeable/experienced	1%
Accepting/unconditional positive regard/uniqueness/treated as individuals	1%

NB. The percentages are expressed as a percentage of all nominations received, and not as a percentage of participating respondents

SKILLS REQUIRED BY A PERSONAL TUTOR

Respondents were asked to nominate the *skills* needed to act as a personal tutor. Their responses are contained in Table 18:

Table 18 SKILLS REQUIRED BY A PERSONAL TUTOR NOMINATED BY STAFF & MANAGEMENT	
Listening	24%
Communicating/verbalising/feeding back/inter-personal/negotiating/re-framing/questioning	15%
Administrating/organising/methodical/facilitating/record-keeping	11%
Identifying learning barriers and solutions/referring	9%
Having a good subject/programme knowledge/authority	6%
Advice and guidance/mentoring	6%
Engendering confidence/self-esteem/empowering	5%
Organising activities/Team-bonding	3%
Motivating	3%
Being aware of rights and equal opportunities of all parties	3%
Giving tough love/disciplining/non-exploitive/non-abusive use of power	1%
Understanding own life experience	1%
Understanding student life issues	1%
Defining boundaries/maintaining professional distance	1%
Advocacy	1%
Going at student's pace	1%
Acknowledging uniqueness of each student	1%
Controlling/directing/co-ordinating/being efficient/focusing	1%
Using judgement/balancing perspectives	1%
Being actively involved/doing	1%
Co-working	1%
Creating positive environments	1%
Resources knowledge (academic and personal support)	1%
Counselling	1%
Groupwork	1%

NB. The percentages are expressed as a percentage of all nominations received, and not as a percentage of participating respondents

TRAINING FOR THE ROLE OF PERSONAL TUTOR

Some 91% of respondents identified the need for formal training for the role of personal tutor, with two respondents commenting that:

“I’ve never had any training to be a tutor. I was given a Handbook” (PT/I-2)

“I was never taught what makes a good tutor, nobody ever taught me, I was given a class, I’m the tutor, now I’ve got to get on with it”. (SSS/I-2)

Whilst respondents called for some formal training for personal tutors, there was some disagreement regarding the content of such a programme, with 79% of the above respondents failing to suggest what such a programme might contain, 11% suggesting counselling skills, and 10% suggesting mentoring skills. This state of affairs is summed up by the comments of a member of *staff training personnel*:

I think one of the problems is the fact that having been responsible for the development of a tutor development programme over the past couple of years, the fact that there’s been such a difference in understanding of the roles of tutors between the various Heads of Schools, not just the tutors, but the Lead Tutors as well, it’s made it difficult for me to develop a tutor development programme which is accepted by the tutors themselves and because we operate a staff development process which is largely based on self-selection, staff don’t always recognise where their skill gaps are, where they need to develop a different attitude, so we don’t always deliver a programme which is based on needs. We end up delivering it based on wants and sometimes the wants are poles apart from the needs.

(STP/I-1)

Two respondents from the *staff training personnel* (STP/I-2), (STP/I-3) argued that a policy on training was needed, with the latter respondent adding that “we don’t train teachers for their tutorial skills, so therefore, it’s very much learning how to do it, by luck, or by networking with colleagues”. The first respondent (STP/I-2) also added that the “skills of tutorials are quite different to teaching, quite different”.

A member of *senior management* registered his frustration about the whole tutorial service, when he stated that he required:

more money, more staff, more staff hours for staff development,
and also more staff to substitute those tutors that we currently

have, that are not interested in personal tutoring – to bring in a different breed of person, that wants to be a ...personal tutor
(M/I-2)

He goes on to conclude: “From my point of view, I think we haven’t got tutorial support sussed, either for full-time or part-time”

PRACTICE SUPPORT FOR PERSONAL TUTORS

The idea of practice support for personal tutors was raised by 72% of respondents, with 53% of these respondents suggesting that the support should be individual (1-1) support, and 47% suggesting that it should be peer group support.

Differing viewpoints emerged over the usefulness of the Lead Tutor role in supporting personal tutors. Two *senior managers* were positive as witnessed by the following comments:

As with Counsellors – and I wouldn’t say a tutor is a counsellor in that professional sense of it – but as a counsellor also needs their own support mechanisms, tutors also have a right I think, to make sure they do have some support mechanisms. I hope through the Lead Tutor system we’ve done some of that”.
(M/I-3)

“I think the Senior Tutor system is excellent, and the system of Lead Tutors”.
(M/I-5)

However, a member of *staff training personnel* (STP/I-2) expressed some doubts about the worthiness of the system when he stated: “Well, there’s this notion of a Lead Tutor that nobody seems to be quite sure of what they are. I think that needs clarifying”.

Meanwhile, a *junior manager* (M/I-6) suggested that such support was necessary in order to alleviate staff stress, when he stated that: “There is a huge pressure on tutors to actually chase up students who haven’t attended tutorials or who haven’t attended lectures and so on, and I think tutors become over-tired and over-stressed”.

Research Question 3

What do students, staff, and management, see as the main requirements for the formation and maintenance of a beneficial working relationship, between a student and a personal tutor?

THE STUDENT/PERSONAL TUTOR RELATIONSHIP

(a) *Process*

When asked to suggest the factors that have most impact on the formation and maintenance of a good student/personal tutor relationship, the responses could be organised into four areas, the first two being within the remit of the personal tutors and the remaining two within the remit of college management.

(i) Existence of a positive atmosphere

The personal qualities of the personal tutor were nominated by 15% of all *staff respondents* as being important in creating a positive atmosphere, particularly citing the display by a personal tutor of *respect, open-ness and honesty* towards students.

(ii) Establishing the status of the relationship

A further factor that received considerable comment was the ‘*status*’ of the relationship, particularly in terms of differentiating between ‘being a friend’ and ‘being friendly’. Below are two representative comments, one from a *senior*

manager and one from a *personal tutor*:

The relationship needs to be one where there is a clear professional relationship, there's a student/tutor relationship, there is a level of friendship there, but at the same time it is a professional mutual relationship where people accept where the boundaries are and accept what the limits are. (M/I-3)

It's this balance between being this available friend, but also being a figure in authority, because at the end of the day, that's what you are and they need that, some of them, they need to know that you're the person in charge, so you can't be too friendly. (PT/I-9)

A further element was added by a member of the staff *training personnel* (STP/I-3), who suggested that: "I think it's with the younger students, very much a quasi-parental role, with the older ones, it's a critical friend". However, a slightly different angle on these differences between the two student groups was offered by a *senior manager* (M/I-3), who suggested that "Younger students may need a slightly different approach to some older students. It may not be an age thing, it might be a maturity thing".

(iii) Existence of privacy

Whilst 90% of *personal tutors* and 100% of *student support staff* thought tutorial privacy to be an important issue in terms of providing designated tutorial accommodation, only 33% of *management respondents* and 33% of *staff training respondents* believed this to be the case:

Two *personal tutors* comment:

I think environment's important. I've had occasions when I've had to do personal tutorials in my car because there's not been any private space available. That's not good, for goodness sake, we're meant to be in a

professional role here (PT/I-1).

“I think we’re very poor in this college at having space for personal tutorials”.
(PT/I-1)

Linked to the existence of privacy, is the issue of confidentiality. This element in the relationship was introduced by a *senior manager* who commented:

The whole issue of confidentiality is a sensitive area of course, and by not breaching confidence if it has been made clear from the outset, that one is going to try and keep confidentiality. I think that is an issue where a personal tutor, if they know they are not going to be able to maintain confidentiality, need to mention that to the student from the outset.
(M/I-8)

(iv) Contact

15% of *personal tutor respondents* expressed the opinion that the personal tutor role must involve contact with students other than in the personal tutor role.

(b) Benefits

Respondents were asked to suggest the value of the student/personal tutor relationship in terms of contributing to the student’s learning experience. The suggestions received are contained in Table 19:

Table 19 BENEFITS OF THE STUDENT/PERSONAL TUTOR RELATIONSHIP NOMINATED BY STAFF & MANAGEMENT	
Motivates students and helps them to ‘stay the distance’	36%
Improves student’s confidence to organise own study	18%
Improves student’s performance towards higher achievement	18%
Facilitates disclosure and resolution of barriers to learning	10%
Improves a student’s self-esteem	8%
Provides students with some stability and consistency during learning	6%
Enables students to accept criticism more easily	4%

NB. The percentages are expressed as a percentage of all nominations received, and not as percentages of participating respondents

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The primary aim of this study, was to attempt to identify the underlying factors within the personal tutorial system that are crucial in supporting student learning. The data was collected from a wide variety of sources, in order to address the research question and sub-questions that were the focus of this research. These were summarised and presented in chapter 4. This chapter will analyse and discuss the key issues and themes which emerged, along with any un-expected findings. It will also briefly refer to any areas that were significant by their absence.

When commencing analysis of the data, it became apparent that there existed a wide range of opinion and perceptions across the college at the various hierarchical levels, inter-group levels and intra-group levels, as to how tutorial support should be delivered. Some were complementary and some were contradictory of each other. This has meant at times that it has been necessary to identify the essence or context of what has been stated, in order to bring some order to the discussion. In addition, it emerged that there were many assumed meanings within the terminology used to discuss tutoring in the college, not least with regard to job titles. Some words and phrases were also used generically by the respondents, further clouding larger issues, and possibly assisting them in sub-consciously avoiding the necessity to indulge in deeper reflection on their part. Examples of such words and phrases being ‘pastoral care’, personal care’, ‘counselling’, and ‘mentoring’. One further general point of interest, was that occasionally, a member of the management team would offer an opinion that was not in modern parlance, ‘*on message*’, and was often in direct opposition to formal college policy, thus perhaps highlighting an inner conflict between the professional role and the private person. In the analysis that follows, discussion will be linked to the research question and sub-questions listed in the

Introduction to this thesis.

Research Question 1

What impact have external and internal influences had on the nature of the personal tutorial support offered, in terms of purpose, style, content, and availability?

Finding (1): Tutorial provision was found to be subject to a wide range of external and internal influences.

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL INFLUENCES ON TUTORIAL PROVISION

Whilst there was some general agreement in the data that external influences such as government agencies and awarding bodies had affected the way the tutorial system was organised and delivered, by far the strongest influence was seen to be internal, namely, that of senior management. However, one member of the *staff training group* (STP/I-3) put forward an argument that there existed several internal groups or sub-cultures, which were in conflict with one another at various levels of the organisation, one being ‘managerialism versus professionalism’. This respondent further argued that such tensions had created a situation whereby there existed a dual system of tutorial support within the college, the formal system which is entirely driven by funding, and an informal system provided by personal tutors giving individual informal support outside formal class time. This latter aspect was also highlighted in a small college-led survey of personal tutors in 2003 (see chapter 1). The survey noted that 97% of personal tutors needed to supplement formal allocated tutorial time, by ‘borrowing’ time allocated for other tasks.

Such a widespread practice within the case-study college could have a ‘knock on’ effect of personal tutors having to use ‘unpaid’ private time in order to complete their workload, or alternatively seek short cuts in their working practice,

thus causing stress to staff and a possible dilution of service provision to students. A further consequence of all this, might be that experienced personal tutors might leave the profession to be replaced, by either more part-time staff or new and possibly less experienced full-time staff.

Whatever the justification for this alleged dual provision, and whatever the ‘real numbers’ are, of staff subsidising tutorial time with time allocated for other purposes, it is clear from the literature consulted and from the practice at this college, that funding issues have been a dominant factor in shaping any tutorial provision.

Consequently, *senior management* at the College have been placed in a ‘double-bind position, of having to provide ‘more for less’ whilst at the same time, having to ‘raise standards’ of service delivery, and this had inevitably led to ‘efficiency savings’. The data contained an example of this balancing act, in that following criticism by the Adult Learning Inspectors during an inspection visit in 2003, college management were ‘obliged’ to give a firm commitment to implement its long-standing intention since 1998 to allocate formal tutorial time to part-time students. This duly commenced in the academic year 2003-2004.

As noted in chapter 1, these ‘efficiency savings’ have impacted on all areas of college functioning. The ongoing external influence on college service provision, was summarised in the data by a member of *senior management* at the college, who stated:

I’m sure in the last few years at colleges many of us would say we’ve been far too pre-occupied with budgets and funding cuts and organisational structures and how we do more for less, and I get fed up as a senior manager, as most senior managers do, with being constrained on those sorts of things. (M/I-3).

Finding (2): A variety of perceptions existed as to the overall purpose, and operations of tutorials, particularly in the areas of style and content

PURPOSE OF TUTORIAL SESSIONS

Large Group tutorials

The data revealed that whilst the two student groups (*16-19 full-time and 19+ part-time*) were in agreement regarding the two main purposes of large group tutorials '*course expectations*' and '*identifying and addressing group problems*' there was some marked difference in the priority given to each purpose, with 48% of the *19+ part-time students* seeing the outlining of '*course expectations*' as easily the most important purpose of the large group tutorial as compared to 29% of the *16-19 full-time students*. This may be a reflection of the 'felt anxiety' by older students of having long departed from their time in formal compulsory education, and therefore lacking knowledge of what was expected of 'modern' students.

When comparing the purposes of the large group tutorial as identified by the *student respondents*, with those of the *staff and management respondents*, some commonality of view was identified, in that '*course expectations*' and '*identifying and addressing group problems (group cohesion)*' were cited. However, *staff respondents* also gave equal weighting to two other purposes, these being '*outlining college resources*' and '*general information-giving*'.

Individual (1-1) tutorials

The data revealed that of all the purposes nominated by the various student and staff respondent groups, only one of them was common to all respondent groups, namely, '*academic progress reviewing*'. All these purposes were given various priorities by each group of respondents, with the top-ranked nomination being different for each group of respondents.

For the *16-19 full-time students*, there was no marked difference in the valuation of the three main purposes they nominated. However, the fact that '*academic progress reviewing*' ranked so highly, may be seen as an 'accepted' continuation of their past experience within formal compulsory education. For the *19+ part-time students*, '*receiving academic advice and guidance*' was their main nomination, and this again may be a reflection of their concerns over the length of time since they last experienced formal education. With regard to the nomination by staff of '*identifying and addressing barriers to student learning*', this may be driven by the need to address student retention and achievement issues vis-à-vis government funding requirements. Of note is that '*motivating students*' was rated quite highly by both student groups but did not merit a mention by staff respondents.

Interestingly, one of the *19+ part-time students* suggested a further purpose of the individual (1-1) tutorials might be the formation of a student/personal tutor relationship, when she stated that:

the tutorials are for the student to get to know their tutor and vice versa, and for them to know some background knowledge about yourself, and where you're coming from, what support you have, so that they can support you and advise you in your studies. A1-I/10)

This amounted to what might be described as a plea for a 'holistic needs assessment' via the discreet comfort of a close working relationship between the student and personal tutor, which if enacted universally by the college, could have major ramifications for the whole area of tutorial provision and personal tutoring. This topic of the student/personal tutor relationship, will be discussed more comprehensively later in the chapter.

It can be seen from the data therefore, that there existed a variety of perceptions amongst the various respondent groups at the case-study college, as to the primary purpose of both the individual (1-1) and the large group tutorial sessions. Overall, the students appeared to be more focused and concerned with working

together with fellow students to meet course expectations, whilst staff seemed to be more aware of the 'wider picture' of resources and general information-giving in order to facilitate successful course outcomes.

Of interest in the data is the fact that only 5% of *staff nominations* were recorded regarding '*personal and social development*' as a purpose of the large group tutorial session. This is particularly significant in view of the prescribed standardised large group tutorial programme of 'enrichment activities' promoted by senior management, which was intended for just such a purpose. (see later discussion in this chapter on 'content').

Also of note, is that despite all student respondents undertaking work experience placements during their time at the college, with many staff undertaking work placement visits, neither staff or student respondents within the data, mentioned a purpose of either type of tutorial as being one of '*professional development*' sessions, whereby theory learned on the course would be linked to practice in the workplace. This may be indicative of the 'primary need' of the organisation to guide students to a successful '*academic course completion*' in order to maximise central government funding for the college.

TUTORIAL STYLES

The data revealed that a significant number (20%) of *staff respondents* were in agreement that a *range of tutorial styles* should be available for employment within the tutorial support system. It was also felt that it was down to individual personal tutors to decide which was the most appropriate style to use, based on the needs of specific students or groups of students. However, in terms of operational reality, the large group tutorial had become established as the main style utilised for the *16-19 full-time students*, coupled with some individual (1-1) sessions when necessary. The reverse system was provided for the *19+ part-time students*, in that they received the individual (1-1) tutorial style as their main source of support, with the occasional large group tutorial being provided when

necessary.

There was an acknowledgement from both student and staff respondents within the data, that the style most preferred by the students was the individual (1-1) tutorial, not only in terms of it offering the opportunity to acknowledge academic problems, but also the facility to discuss private and personal matters that might be acting as a barrier to their learning. As for the large group tutorials, these were not liked by the *16-19 full-time students*, the content of the sessions often being seen as irrelevant to their needs, with a lot of time also wasted having to wait around to be seen on an individual basis. Although the views of this student group were acknowledged by staff within the data, the mode of service delivery remained unchanged.

A significant number of staff respondents (43%) suggested that another style of tutorial provision might be offered, particularly for the benefit of part-time students, namely a Tutorial Drop-in Centre. That such a facility would soon be operational was advised by a member of the *Student Support Staff* (SSS/I-2). Interestingly, this intention would seem to be a reversal of previously stated college policy (see chapter 1), in that the current and latest Tutors Handbook (2001) states that “the personal tutor should be a person who teaches the student or who is closely involved with the course. A *junior manager* re-inforced this view when she commented:

I think that someone who's a personal tutor should actually also teach on the programme and be involved with the students. I don't think that you can do one without the other, the actual tutorial part without teaching the students (M/I-1)

Further support for this view came from a *personal tutor* (PT/I-2), who believed that the student/personal tutor relationship was important, and that such a casual facility as a Tutorial Drop-in Centre would militate against this inter-personal process and that therefore the idea was un-workable. A similar view was expressed by a *19+ part-time student* (A1/I-9) who commented that: “I think

they need to know you, you'd be a bit put off going to see somebody you only see at tutorials, I think I'd be put off by that". Perhaps the main reason behind such resistance, is that students seemed to regard their own personal tutor as 'first port of call' in preference to seeing a 'stranger' in a centralised tutorial provision (see also later section on referring students for specialist help). Such a preference may be underpinned by the fact that students had already started to form a trusting relationship with their personal tutors, crucial in the disclosure of any personal or academic barriers to learning. Neither would they like to keep repeating their 'stories' each time they visited the Drop-in Centre and spoke to a different person. In addition, from either an academic or personal point of view, it could be argued that any contact with a general drop-in service, that might suggest/offer different solutions to the same problem, might at best cause some confusion for the student and could even worsen a situation.

Interestingly, no nominations were received supporting a system that provided a centralised pool of Super Tutors as a college-wide facility. (*Super Tutors being those who offer only a tutoring support service to nominated courses with no other contact with the student taking place other than in the tutorial session*). Rejection of this tutorial style came from both a *junior manager* (M/I-6) and a *senior manager* (M/I-6). the latter stating that "We've flirted with the idea, but we've never gone there with this college...I'm not attracted to that model". The argument against such an idea, perhaps being the same as those for a Tutorial Drop-in Centre.

A case for some degree of flexibility in tutorial service delivery was argued by a second year *16-19 full-time student* (Y2/I-5) who commented: "Maybe ask the group how they wanted to do tutorials and how they wanted to spend them, and if people then don't need that sort of help, then you don't have to come". This latter suggestion, that tutorial attendance could be regarded as optional, is significant in that the data revealed a significant number of students (22%) who desired the facility to opt out of the tutorial system altogether. Some possible reasons have already been noted and will be expanded upon in the next section of this chapter dealing with 'content'. Other possible reasons could be that some students have

experienced 'non-productive' relationships with past school-teachers or college personal tutors, and therefore may not wish to repeat a negative experience.

Interestingly, it was noted within the data, that one *junior manager* who was also a *personal tutor* (M/I-9) claimed to have no problem with any of her *16-19 full-time students* attending tutorials, advising that: "my students don't have a choice". Such insistence that young students attend tutorials whether they need them or not, could possibly lead to some resentment and thereby create a further unnecessary barrier to a more personalised selective usage by students. If this is a widespread practice with the *16-19 full-time students*, then it could raise questions as to whose needs are being met by the tutorial system in the case-study college, and whether learners are 'customers with rights' or 'students with no rights', other than to 'protest' by leaving the course, with the attendant implications for both student retention and college funding.

CONTENT OF TUTORIAL SESSIONS

Large group tutorials

The data shows that both groups of *student respondents* were consistent in acknowledging that the purpose of tutorial sessions should be directly reflected in the tutorial content activities, for example by nominating '*outlining course expectations*' as both the 'primary purpose' and 'primary content activity' of the large group tutorials.

Staff respondents were less consistent however, in that the item '*activities/guest speakers/discussion*' received 31% of nominations as the primary activity of tutorial 'content', when it had only received 5% of nominations from staff as a 'purpose' of tutorial sessions, albeit in another guise of '*personal and social development*'. The main nominated item (*activities/guest speakers, discussion*), is the main vehicle used by personal tutors to meet the expectation that they should deliver a prescribed standardised tutorial programme to *16-19 full-time*

students, addressing a wide range of personal and social issues. This prescribed standardised tutorial programme of '*enrichment opportunities*' for the *16-19 full-time students* (via *Curriculum 2000*), is very much linked to government funding arrangements for colleges.

Although these prescribed '*enrichment opportunities*' are aimed at promoting the 'personal and social development' of *16-19 full-time students*, they are not necessarily of direct relevance to their primary goal of gaining a qualification. This imposition was made on students, despite advice from Hamblin as far back as 1983, warning that the "imposition of guidance on the 16-19 age group will probably result in rejection and ridicule. Students see it as demeaning, paternalistic or unwanted interference" (Hamblin 1983:1).

Individual (1-1) tutorials

In terms of the *individual (1-1) tutorials*, the data shows that both *staff and students* nominated similar areas of content, albeit with differing priorities. The area where all *student* and the *staff respondents* agreed, was with regard to '*addressing any problems/barriers to learning*'. However, another area was strongly nominated, not by the *19+ part-time students*, but by the *16-19 full-time students* along with the *staff respondents*, this being that of '*academic progress reviewing*'. This involves a process of target-setting, action-planning and evaluating, with a tandem activity of tracking a student's attendance record. This format for individual (1-1) tutorials particularly for the *16-19 full-time students*, is very much geared towards the government requirement for colleges to improve retention and achievement rates for this group of students. How much the *16-19 full-time students* subscribed to this prescribed standardised approach in the individual (1-1) tutorials by having 'internalised' the college-imposed 'custom and practice' was not clarified. One reason for such apparent 'acceptance' may be that most had come straight from school to college and were already familiar with such a system of monitoring students work. Such students would also be familiar with contemporary study skills and therefore the main content of tutorials for *16-19 full-time students*, could be described as

providing ‘academic continuity’ rather than ‘academic development’.

Although the *19+ part-time students* acknowledged that one activity of individual tutorials might be one of *academic progress-reviewing* by the college, the data shows that it was deemed less important than their own needs of receiving *advice and guidance in personal and academic matters*. The reason behind such a self-focused view towards individual (1-1) tutorials is perhaps personally historical, in that many older students regarded themselves as ‘returning to learning’ for a ‘second chance’. Thus for them, it was not so much a matter of providing ‘academic continuity’ as with the *16-19 full-time students*, but more of facilitating an ‘academic re-start’.

The data revealed that whilst a large majority of *management respondents* (83%) were in favour of utilising the prescribed standardised tutorial programme for the *16-19 full-time students*, the notion was only supported by 30% of *personal tutors*, perhaps indicating that its introduction was a management-driven decision.

When examining the responses of those *staff and management* who supported the prescribed standardised tutorial process and agenda, two main reasons seemed to emerge for its existence. Firstly, as noted earlier, there was the necessity to attract government funding, and secondly, college management also needed to address the fact that some staff did not value the tutorial system, as noted within the data by a *junior manager* (M/I-4). Reasons for such indifference by some personal tutors might be that they believed that *subject teaching* and *curriculum development* were their main roles, and not that of *providing support and welfare* to students. Others may feel that they did not have the skills or training for such a role (See later comments in this chapter on training).

However, as seen from the data, not all staff respondents were in favour of a ‘top-down’ approach in terms of a prescribed standardised tutorial programme, believing that ownership and control of the tutorial process and content should be jointly negotiated by staff and students. One respondent from the *staff training personnel* (STP/I-3) saw the promotion of a prescribed standardised

approach to tutorial content for both large group and individual (1-1) tutorials, to be taking away the professional autonomy of personal tutors. A *personal tutor* (PT/I-2) expressed similar dissatisfaction at having to implement a tutorial agenda that was not necessarily of her own choosing. Other possible reasons why staff might be resistant to this approach, might be that they believed the time could be utilised more effectively for meeting their own needs in dealing with college administration matters, and also the course requirements of another external influence, the awarding bodies. Further, it would also create time for addressing the needs of students in terms of personal and academic matters in order to ensure a successful outcome to their studies. However, it may be a sign that college is responding to the concerns of staff, in that the data contains comments from a member of *student support services* (SSS/I-2) and a *senior manager* (M/I-3) both suggesting a certain amount of flexibility, and that the prescribed standardised tutorial programme should be regarded as a 'menu' from which students and staff can jointly 'negotiate'.

Finding (3): The time allocated for tutorials during the academic year, was regarded as being insufficient to meet both the standardised tutorial requirements of the college, and the personal and academic needs of the students

TUTORIAL ENTITLEMENT

(a) *Availability of tutorial time*

It emerged from the data that a notional group of 20 x *16-19 full-time students* received a weekly 2 hour tutorial time. This short period of time was expected to accommodate course expectations, college administrative matters, deliver a prescribed standardised tutorial programme of 'enrichment opportunities', offer some individual (1-1) personal tutorial time which would include an 'academic progress review', as well as dealing with any personal or academic needs brought by the students. The general practice seemed to be to devote the first hour to

group tutorials and the second hour to individual (1-1) tutorials. The arithmetic means that each student in the group was only entitled to 6 minutes of formally allocated personal tutorial time each week. If this is re-calculated for the one hour slot for individual (1-1) tutorials only, this works out at 3 minutes per student per week. Such a small amount of time means that many student-raised items may only be dealt with briefly and possibly superficially. This could leave lingering feelings that their needs are not important, thus possibly leading to a lowering of student self-esteem and confidence, with possible implications for student retention and achievement. Consequently, it is understandable that 62% of *staff and management respondents* believed that more tutorial time should be available. Interestingly, the 33% of student respondents who demanded that more tutorial time be allocated, were only referring to the individual (1-1) tutorials and not the large group tutorials. The possible reasons for this are contained in earlier sections in this chapter dealing with tutorial styles and content.

The data also revealed that *student respondents* complained of booking systems always being 'booked up' and, sessions over-running.

In an attempt to resolve the concerns of students, the data (noted earlier in the chapter) showed that some personal tutors of *19+ part-time student groups* had 'created' some extra individual (1-1) tutorial time for their students from within their teaching programme or their general workload time. However, this does not address the problem of a student seeking urgent help when the personal tutor is 'off site'. A solution to this, was offered by one of the *staff training personnel* (STP/I-3) who suggested that "every staff room should have an answer-phone, every staff room should have at least one computer that is accessible to external mail".

In terms of placing some boundaries on student expectations of time availability, a member of the staff training personnel (STP/I-2) suggested a scheme of tutorial vouchers being awarded to students at the beginning of their studies. Here, students not requiring as many tutorials as others, could give their vouchers to other students. Handing over the 'bookings' in such a way, could therefore be

seen as a form of empowerment by allowing students to decide their own priorities and needs. It could also be seen as a way of moving the responsibility for 'time-rationing' onto the shoulders of the 'customers' themselves. Such a suggestion however, does not really address the overall problem nominated, namely, that insufficient time is formally allocated within a personal tutor's workload to meet the needs of students, not least any unexpected needs.

Of interest, is that some staff noted that having sufficient contact time to form a trusting relationship, was especially crucial with the 19+ *part-time students*, in that more work usually needed doing, because they brought with them to tutorials more personal problems than the younger students, thereby requiring a lot of help and encouragement before they could even start addressing their learning needs. As noted earlier, the suggested intention of introducing an evening Tutorial Drop-in Centre for 19+ *part-time students* in 2004, was met with some reservations by both staff and students.

(b) *Availability of personal tutors*

It appeared from the data that students were not only complaining about having insufficient formal tutorial time, but also complaining about personal tutors not being 'available' outside formal tutorial time, thus making it very difficult to receive 'urgent' help from the personal tutor. This appears to suggest that students see no boundaries in terms of accessing a personal tutor if they are 'visible'. A member of the *staff training personnel* (STP/I-1) summarised the position when he stated that "there is an assumption that the tutor is always there for them, wherever they are, they can catch the tutor in the corridor, and that the tutor has got to stop and deal with the problem".

It also appeared from the data, that whilst some personal tutors had set boundaries to availability when dealing with such situations, others had not, and thus were seen to be totally available. A *senior manager respondent* (M/I-3) within the data, highlighted the potential dangers of creating such dependency if personal tutors made themselves too available, particularly with 'needy' students.

However, the fact that some of the *management respondents* continued to hold the long defunct notion of providing 'pastoral care' to students as the generic task of personal tutoring (see chapter 1), almost ensured that some form of dependency might be inevitable. Not all personal tutors were clear about the potential danger of creating such dependency however, as witnessed by the comments of one *personal tutor* (PT/I-2) who advised with regard to her *16-19 full-time students* that "I am totally available, even in coffee breaks, but sometimes I put my foot down". Not only does such confused thinking stand in opposition to popular feeling of other staff respondents, but also carries the potential for confusion amongst her own students, as to just when she will be 'putting her foot down' or not.

Even though they were aware of student concerns, 86% of *staff respondents* stated that they should only be available for *routine* tutorial work within formally allocated tutorial times. However, 83% of these respondents also acknowledged that in addition to the formal tutorial time allowed on the timetables, they might also need to be available if 'on site' and 'in working hours' for '*urgent*' discussions with students. This of course could create problems in terms of definition, as what is '*urgent*' for one person might not seem so for another.

These complaints by student respondents, again raise the issue of exactly what information or expectations were imparted during the student's induction process. It may also support the necessity for a specific 'tutorial agreement' in order to provide a single interpretation of what is actually 'on offer'.

It would appear from the data that many demands are made on the time allocated for tutorial support, which in turn causes a variety of coping strategies to be utilised by the personal tutors. Such diversity of informal practice could cause some problems in terms of equal opportunities within the case-study college.

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions of students, staff and management, regarding the role, responsibilities, skills and qualities of the personal tutor, particularly with regard to the recruitment, training and practice support of personnel?

Finding (1): There were diverse perspectives on the role and responsibilities of a personal tutor

ROLE OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR

The data clearly revealed a strong consensus amongst both student and staff respondents, that a 'holistic' approach should be the essence of the role, namely, *'dealing with both personal and academic matters'*. This means that when assessing a student's need in order to inform the tutorial provision required, it is essential that the 'whole person' is considered. This might mean that cognisance has to be taken of both personal and academic needs. However, when examining the data more closely, it revealed that there existed several ways of interpreting and operating this approach. Firstly, there were those staff who would include in their assessment all factors disclosed by a student, whether personal or academic (past or present), inside or outside college. This position is summarised by the comments of a Lead Tutor who argues:

It's about supporting them in every area, giving a holistic approach if you like, not only in terms of monitoring their academic progress and encouraging them, but also about giving them any pastoral support they might need with issues that affect them outside their course of study
(PT/I-6)

This view is supported within education literature by Lawrence (1994:175) who argues that: "education, of whatever skills, needs to be concerned with the whole person and not just the part known as the intellect"

However, other respondents were less inclusive, and would address personal and academic issues, but only if college-based. Further, some would include both personal and academic factors, but would give priority in the first instance to academic factors. A member of the *staff training group* (STP/I-3) reversed this latter position however, and would give a higher priority to personal factors over academic factors, not least in terms of facilitating student retention.

With regard to the other 'role elements' nominated in the data, *staff respondents* believed that the second element should be one of acting as a '*referral point for college resources*' in order to address student learning barriers. This was in contrast to the student nomination of '*motivating/encouraging/building student confidence*'. This latter element was supported by 100% of the *first year 19+ part-time students*, which could perhaps be indicative of the anxiety and lack of confidence and self-belief of older students 'returning to learning' following a long period since leaving school.

From the above data, it would appear that whilst the students tended to focus on the immediate personal situation, the staff had a more comprehensive vision of the role, particularly as their third nominated aspect of the role was one of '*conducting the whole student experience*'.

Of significance within the data, was the fact that 10% of *staff respondents* alleged that the staff were unclear about the role and responsibilities of the personal tutor. In addition, 20% of *staff respondents* alleged that students were similarly unclear about the role and responsibilities of a personal tutor. Obviously, this could again raise questions about the college-prescribed induction process, which if proven to be ineffective, could have 'knock-on' effects for the duration of the student's time at college, and ultimately, student retention and funding issues.

Role of the personal tutor in addressing personal problems of students

(a) Extent of involvement by personal tutor

The data revealed that 90% of *student respondents* were willing for their personal tutor to offer help with addressing personal problems, with some respondents acknowledging that academic and personal issues were inextricably linked. The lowest support (although still positively significant at 66%) came from the first year 16-19 full-time student group. This latter point is perhaps understandable, in view of the student group only just having left school to enter the world of adult education, and who were perhaps more accustomed to sharing their personal problems with schoolmates rather than teaching staff.

Whilst it was apparent from the data that a large majority of *staff respondents* (90%) were willing to help students with personal problems, they were only willing to become involved to varying degrees and only if the problem was affecting a student's ability to learn. Further, a large portion of these (78%), were only willing to offer help either as an initial listening ear (ventilation session) which may be sufficient to take the 'steam' out of a situation, or listen in order to assess the type of specialist help that might be required, whether located within or without the college campus. The remaining staff (22%) stated that they were actually willing to become involved directly in seeking a solution, but only if it was within their capability, and sufficient time could be made available.

However, not all respondents were supportive of the idea of personal tutors becoming so personally involved. This was stated quite forcibly by a *junior manager* who commented:

We are not social workers, we are not counsellors. If you go to a social worker or if you go to a psychotherapist as a private individual, you will be going for a very specific problem that you want help with. If you come to college and you want to learn something and you want to gain a qualification, then this is what we are here for. (M/I-6)

This view is in addition to those staff noted earlier, who either do not see any actual value in the role of a personal tutor, or are reluctant to participate in such a wide remit to the role that includes not only understanding the personal problems of students, but also possibly having to address them.

It would seem from the data therefore, that students who take the emotional risk of disclosing personal problems to their personal tutor, could be met by a variety of responses, ranging from direct help, limited help, through to referral elsewhere. However, this latter option, could exacerbate a student's problem if it seemed that they were being rejected, either through indifference, or by being 'passed along the line' to another person, albeit a specialist worker. This 'emotional risk' was picked up by a first year 19+ *part-time student* who warned:

You need to understand first though, where the (*personal*) tutor stands, whether they're there just for tutorials, or whether they are there to give you help with personal problems, so you need to know where the boundaries are. (*My italics*) (A1/I-7)

(b) Referring for specialist help

For staff, the boundaries of becoming involved or not, or to what degree, were perhaps reflected in the reasons offered for the timing of making a referral for specialist worker input. A variety of factors were identified, the main ones being the amount of training, skills and experience they had in dealing with such matters, along with the personal time available, the inference being that the less these factors were present, then the more speedy the referral for alternative help. Also of consideration was the seriousness of the presenting problem,

Interestingly, only a small number of *staff respondents* (7%) considered the quality of the student/personal tutor relationship as a factor when making a referral. This is surprising, in view of the fact that students would prefer to receive help from their personal tutor as their 'first port of call' for help, rather than from a stranger, a fact noted by both a *junior manager* (M/I-4) and a

personal tutor (PT/I-2). This is further endorsed by another *personal tutor* (PT/I-1) who adds: “The thing is, you can’t make students go and see someone else, and it could well be the reason that they’re talking to you, is because they have built up this relationship and they do trust you”.

Sub-roles of the personal tutor

Another interesting development from the data, was that *staff respondents* (but particularly the *personal tutor respondents*), also saw the personal tutor role as containing 20 sub-roles (containing a further 43 descriptive titles) the main ones nominated being those of *disciplinarian/authority figure, advisor/mentor/helper/social worker, and monitor/progress-chaser*. This large number of nominations may be a reflection of their ‘feelings’ of *role overload*, or it might be the actual reality of the post at the practitioner level. Alternatively, it could reflect the multiple sub-roles originally stated in the 1998-99 Tutor’s Handbook created by management and which they may still feel obliged to perform, a key one of which was to act as a ‘control’ element towards young students (see chapter 1). This latter role expectation by management, was different to that of the personal tutors perception of the role as being caring and supportive, and could possibly be a source of some *role conflict* for staff, which in turn may be a potential source of staff stress.

Of particular interest, is that whilst the sub-role of ‘motivator’ received 40% of student nominations, it only received 1% of staff nominations, yet staff later in the chapter, nominate ‘motivating students’ as being the prime benefit of the student/personal tutor relationship. A further linked irony, is that the sub-role of ‘working partner’ with the students, only received 1% of staff nominations.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR

The most significant point to emerge from the data regarding the responsibilities of the personal tutor, was the differences of view between the various *staff and*

student respondent groups in the number of responsibilities ascribed to the role, with a total of 41 different responsibilities being nominated, (37 from staff and four from students). The four nominations made by students, were also nominated by the staff.

For a significant number of *student respondents* (45% of nominations) the main responsibility of personal tutors is that of *developing student study skills* and the second one (28% of nominations) as being that of *correcting work*. Interestingly, each of these two responsibilities only received 1% of nominations from staff, thus emphasising a considerable difference in perceptions and priorities between the staff and student groups.

In terms of the two main responsibilities nominated by students, the largest number of nominations came from the *19+ part-time students*. This latter point could be a reflection of any anxiety, lack of confidence and self-belief that older students may have about what is expected of them in terms of modern educational requirements, as for some of them, it may have been a long time since they participated in formal education.

The data also highlighted the fact that only 17% of all *student respondents* were able to nominate any responsibilities that personal tutors were expected to perform. This limited response may be a reflection of two things. Firstly, a possible reason as to why the *16-19 full-time students* did not nominate in great numbers, may be that they have found the system of college 'tutoring' different from the tutoring they had experienced at school and were therefore unfamiliar with the operation of a tutorial system within a college context. A second reason might be that not all students were 'reached' during the college-prescribed induction process upon commencing their course of study. This concern was highlighted in the data by a member of the *staff training personnel (STP/I-3)*, when he argues that owing to information overload during a student's induction process, students will only select information that is of immediate relevance to them.

The next point of interest to emerge from the data, was that whilst the *personal tutors* nominated *pastoral duties* and *progress-reviewing* as the two primary responsibilities, this position was reversed by the *management respondents*. This again, would appear to suggest that even between staff and management respondents, there is sometimes a difference in priorities.

Interestingly, *staff respondents* nominated all the responsibilities formally listed in the current Tutor Handbook (2001) (see chapter 1), with the notable exception of ‘providing a programme of enrichment opportunities’. This could be that implementing the prescribed standardised tutorial programme is not yet fully ‘recognised’ and ‘accepted’ by staff as a key responsibility.

Finding (2): Staff recruited to the role of personal tutor were chosen to fill roles rather than for their personal qualities and skills

RECRUITMENT OF PERSONAL TUTORS

It is clear from within the data, that there existed a general expectation within the College, that every lecturer would have the role of personal tutor subsumed within their lecturer’s contract. However, the fact that 76% of respondents commented on the recruitment of personal tutors, within and throughout responses to other interview questions, suggests it is an issue of some concern to staff.

Of the 76% of *staff respondents* who commented, 62% felt that selection should be by application, with only 5% still believing that it should be an assumed ‘part and parcel’ of the lecturer role. That the role of personal tutor should be recognised as a separate and specialist skill to that of a subject tutor, was supported by a significant number of *staff respondents*, who felt that not only should a separate job description be created, but that anyone undertaking the role should receive extra rewards. These views tended to support the results of a piece of college-wide research undertaken in May 2003 (College Personal Tutoring –

Formal Staff Survey) indicating that given the choice, 24% of personal tutoring staff would opt out of the role (see chapter 1).

The data in this current study, also revealed, that some full-time staff would prefer not to undertake the role of personal tutors if given the choice. In addition to extra workload and stress (noted later in the chapter), other reasons were offered by respondents including personal inability, and indifference to the role, A *junior manager* (M/I-4) suggested that any indifference exhibited by staff, may be a reflection of some of the professional sub-cultures that exist in the college, that do not value the 'supportive ethos' required of the role. Of course, another reason why staff may be reluctant to undertake the role may be the lack of a comprehensive and formalised training and support system.

A member of the *Staff Training Personnel* summarises the position regarding the recruitment of staff as personal tutors when he comments:

It shouldn't be automatically assumed that someone can be a (*personal*) tutor, they need to be selected properly on the basis of a job description, and then, they also need to be trained in some of the systems that they will need to administer. And in some areas they may need to develop personal skills and attributes that might require changes in behaviour and attitudes to make them a rounded (*personal*) tutor. (*My italics*) (STP/I-3)

QUALITIES REQUIRED OF A PERSONAL TUTOR

The data showed that between them, student and staff respondents nominated 102 different qualities (41 from students and 61 from staff) that could be grouped under 24 specific 'qualities areas'. Of the 102 qualities nominated, only 23 were common to both respondent groups. Whilst both the *student and staff respondents* nominated *approachable* as the primary quality required of a personal tutor, they differed in the second most important quality, with students nominating *availability* and staff nominating *honesty*. The appearance of

‘availability’ in a section focusing on personal qualities, may be more concerned with the psychological issue of ‘personal interest in the student’ rather than that of physical presence.

A first year *19+ part-time student* summarised most of the qualities nominated by student respondents when she stated:

I think they have to be very personable, I think a personal tutor has to be very approachable. I think they have to be fair-minded and treat everybody the same and not feel that there’s any favouritism at all. Everybody has to feel that they have an equal opportunity. (A/I-1)

In terms of surprises, the data revealed that only 4% of staff nominated *maintaining professional boundaries* as a desirable quality for professional tutors to possess, whilst in addition, the quality of *caring* only received 1% of all nominations. This latter point is particularly interesting, considering that all the personal tutor respondents except one, were either qualified nurses, social workers, child care workers, or counsellors in their previous professions before entering general further education. In addition, they were also currently teaching and personal tutoring students on ‘care courses’ (nursing, social work, child care and counselling).

SKILLS REQUIRED BY A PERSONAL TUTOR

The data showed that between them, *student and staff respondents* nominated 72 individual skills (16 from students and 56 from staff) that could be grouped under 34 specific ‘skill areas’. Of the 72 individual skills nominated, only 5 were common to both respondent groups. Whilst the *student respondents*, particularly the *19+ part-time students* (100%) nominated ‘*motivating*’ along with ‘*listening*’ as the two primary skills required by a personal tutor, the *staff respondents* nominated ‘*listening*’ and ‘*communicating*’, with ‘*motivating*’ only receiving 3% of nominations. This latter point is particularly important, in that yet again,

motivating was nominated by 100% of 19+ *part-time* students as their primary requirement from the personal tutor. This would seem to indicate a big gap between what students want, and what they actually get.

Several surprises were contained within the data, the first of these being that the skill of *defining professional boundaries* only gained 1% of all nominations made by *staff respondents*. This is relevant in view of the statements made in the data by several student and staff respondents, already discussed, expressing a lack of clarity in terms of the personal tutor role and its responsibilities, particularly in terms of the student/personal tutor relationship.

A further surprise arose from the data, in that several skills nominated by students, did not make any appearance in the nominations by staff respondents, these being, *relationship-building*, *understanding needs*, *protecting confidentiality*, and *having skilled experience as a personal tutor*. These items are discussed elsewhere in the chapter.

However, perhaps the most noticeable surprise contribution was provided by staff respondents, in that '*group-working*', only gained 1% of all nominations. This is despite the fact that a large amount of work done by both lecturers and personal tutors, is within a large group or small group context.

The fact that little agreement exists on the key qualities and skills required by a personal tutor, may suggest that the case-study college is not yet ready to move to a recruitment process of systematic selection instead of the current automatic conscription.

Finding (3): Staff were expected to undertake the role of personal tutor with insufficient training or practice support being available

TRAINING FOR THE ROLE OF PERSONAL TUTOR

The data revealed that 91% of staff respondents believed a need existed for a formalised programme of training for those staff fulfilling the personal tutor role. Comments were received claiming that no comprehensive training programme had been provided to help them in their role, and that what input had been received, ranged from the mere handing out of a Handbook, to no input whatsoever. This is highlighted by a typical comment from a member of the Student Support Staff (SSS/I-2) who commented: “I was never taught what makes a good tutor, nobody ever taught me. I was given a class, I’m the tutor. now I’ve got to get on with it”

A significant comment was received from a member of the *staff training personnel* (STP/I-1) who cited two key factors that had thwarted his attempts to mount a training programme for personal tutors. The first of these, was his claim that there existed in the college a large difference of understanding of the role of a personal tutor. Secondly, he felt that as training was optional, it was very difficult to identify what skill gaps existed amongst the personal tutoring staff. His comments were perhaps substantiated to some extent, in that 79% of the respondents who commented on training for personal tutors, failed to make any suggestions regarding the content of skills to be taught. The only skills nominated by a small number of respondents, were ‘counselling skills’ and ‘monitoring skills’. This is somewhat surprising, in view of the wide range of required skills nominated by staff in the previous section of this chapter.

These results within the data, reveal a strange situation, in that whilst staff are complaining of receiving no training for the role of personal tutor, a member of the *staff training personnel* (STP/I-1) is stating his willingness to provide such training, if staff will only articulate their needs. Perhaps the answer might be that personal tutoring is still very much regarded as ‘part and parcel’ of the lecturer

role and thereby it is perhaps assumed that the skills required for personal tutoring, have been duly covered in a lecturer training course. In other words, they are not recognised as two very separate and distinct roles. However, ‘subject tutoring’ is very different from ‘personal tutoring’, a point emphasised by a member of the *staff training personnel* (STP/I-2) when he stated that the “skills of tutorials are quite different to teaching, quite different.”

Further comment came from another member of the *staff training personnel* respondents, stating that a policy for personal tutor training was needed, with another member of this group (STP/I-3) adding: we don’t train teachers for their tutorial skills, so therefore, it’s very much a learning how to do it by luck, or by networking with colleagues. Such a view of course, assumes that the colleagues of a personal tutor, are in a position to advise in terms having a clear perception of their role, have had formal training, and not least, possess an appropriate amount of positive tutoring experience. This raises the important issue of ‘quality assurance’ in terms of service delivery to students (customers).

These frustrations, noted by various respondents within the data in terms of recruitment and training, can best be summed up by the comments of a *senior manager* who felt that the tutoring system was not working, and that in order to develop the tutoring service he required, he would like:

more money, more staff, more staff hours, more hours for staff development, and also more staff to substitute those tutors that we currently have, that are not interested in personal tutoring – to bring in a different breed of person, that wants to be a...personal tutor (M/I-2)

PRACTICE SUPPORT FOR PERSONAL TUTORS

The data revealed that this was an important issue for staff in that 72% of respondents commented that personal tutors need support for their role, particularly in view of the stress of dealing with some of the difficult issues that

students raise. The issue of staff stress was also noted in the data by a *junior manager* (M/I-6) and a *personal tutor* (PT/I-8) in terms of work overload and its attendant stress on personal tutors.

A *senior manager* (M/I-3) was in agreement that personal tutors should be supported in their tutoring practice, arguing that although staff undertaking the personal tutor role were not counsellors, like counsellors, they still needed their own support mechanisms. How such support was to be delivered to personal tutors was evenly split between those who wished to be supported on an individual (1-1) basis, and those who wanted to receive group support, mainly in terms of 'sharing good practice'.

In terms of current practice at the college, the role of Lead Tutor had been specifically created for supporting staff (see chapter 1), and two senior managers (M/I-3) and (M/I-5) asserted in the data, how well the system was working. This was in marked contrast to the view of a member of the *staff training personnel* (STP/I-2), who claimed that no-one knew their purpose and that the role needed clarifying.

Some of this confusion and lack of role clarity might be explained, by a glance at the job description of a Lead Tutor in the college documentation, (discussed in chapter 1) where it notes that their primary functions are to not only support personal tutors, but also to co-ordinate and monitor the work of personal tutors and the tutorial system within their curriculum area. This 'management aspect' is not supported by Williams (1993:67), who takes the view that (*clinical*) 'supervision' ought to be "a working alliance ... where the worker can reflect on themselves in their working situation". A key implication for tutorial practice, is that if personal tutors do not 'experience' being supported, how can they 'learn' how to support others? (*My italics*)

Research Question 3

What do students, staff and management see, as the main requirements for the formation and maintenance of a positive, working relationship between a student and a personal tutor?

THE STUDENT/PERSONAL TUTOR RELATIONSHIP

All transactions involve a relationship to a certain degree, even between a consumer and a provider, with different contexts possibly being the main determinant of the quality and depth of that relationship. This is certainly reflected in the various contexts within the case-study college in which a range of trades and professions are represented and taught, ranging from brick-laying to counselling. Consequently, the importance of developing a tutorial relationship, is likely to receive more prominence within *welfare courses* like those which form the focus of this study, namely *nursing, social work, child care, and counselling*, than other less relationship-orientated courses (see chapter 4).

Finding (1): The personal qualities and skills of the personal tutor were identified as key factors in forming and maintaining a positive working relationship between a student and a personal tutor.

(a) Process

The data revealed several key considerations as being important in forming and maintaining a student/personal tutor relationship. The responses received from both *staff and student respondents* could be grouped into several areas.

Student respondents felt that of key importance in developing a tutorial relationship were the personal skills (*motivating and listening*) and qualities (*approachable and friendly*) displayed by the personal tutor. However, the highest quality nominated was that of being '*respectful*', with 97% of student respondents reporting that they had been treated as 'equals' and 'with respect' by their personal tutors.

Staff respondents also thought personal qualities were important, citing ‘*respect*’ as the primary quality required. This reporting of such a positive attitude from staff to students is interesting in view of the conscriptive method of recruiting staff to the role of personal tutor, without any selection criteria being applied in terms of personal qualities and skills.

Finding (2): The establishment of relationship boundaries was regarded as essential in clarifying the status of the student/personal tutor relationship

Existence of relationship boundaries

An aspect of status was introduced by the *staff respondents*, who questioned whether or not the student/personal tutor relationship was that of a ‘friend’.

A *senior manager* commented that:

The relationship needs to be one where there is a clear professional relationship, there’s a student/tutor relationship, there is the level of friendship there, but at the same time it is a professional mutual relationship where people accept where the boundaries are, and accept what the limits are. (M/I-3)

A *personal tutor* also highlighted the distinction that needs to be made between ‘friendship’ and ‘being friendly’ when she added:

It’s this balance between being this available friend, but also being a figure in authority, because at the end of the day, that’s what you are and they need that, some of them, they need to know that you’re the person in charge, so you can’t be too friendly. (PT/I-9)

An interesting comment was provided in the data by a member of the *staff training personnel* (STP/I-3) who suggested that the status of the relationship

with the *16-19 full-time students* was more akin to that of a ‘quasi-parent’, whilst with regard to the *19+ part-time students*, the relationship was more like that of a ‘critical friend’. Although such a view could be regarded as a sweeping generalisation of student need, such a model might carry potential for practice, but would of course need to take into account the position of individual students and groups of students, as to where they were situated on their lifespan journey of personal growth and development, a factor noted by a *senior manager* (M/I-3).

It can be seen from the data therefore, that there is a need for establishing clear ‘boundaries’ especially when the professional working relationship can be the main vehicle for change. A key aspect of such boundaries in any relationship however is the ethical consideration of confidentiality. Surprisingly, the only staff respondent to raise this as an issue was a *senior manager* (M/I-8), who argued that confidentiality boundaries should be advised at the commencement of the student/personal tutor relationship. In addition, no staff respondents mentioned the need to establish or work from a Code of Ethical Practice, particularly as such a facility carries the potential to offer both staff and students some guidance and protection in what at times may be a close and personal, working relationship.

Finding (3): The provision of designated tutorial accommodation was considered as central to protecting student privacy and confidentiality within student/personal tutor relationship

Existence of privacy

The ‘*lack of private tutorial accommodation*’ was seen as an important issue by both *student and staff respondents*. This factor was nominated by 100% of *students*, 100% of *support staff* and 90% of *personal tutors*, with the latter two groups seeing it as far more important than the possession of personal qualities and skills by the personal tutor, when developing the student/personal tutor relationship. However, only 33% of *management respondents* regarded it as an

important consideration in assisting the formation of a tutorial relationship. The reason that *management respondents* may not ‘recognise’ the ‘*lack of tutorial accommodation*’ as being of primary importance, may be indicative of a resources issue. It is also an issue that needs to be addressed, particularly as the provision of accommodation for student support purposes is a key requirement by ALI/OFSTED in their Handbook for Inspecting Colleges (2002:9).

The strong feelings from both students and staff about the lack of private tutorial accommodation, are perhaps reflected in the following comment made by a personal tutor (PT/I-1):

I think the environment’s important. I’ve had on occasions when I’ve had to do my personal tutorials in my car because there’s not been any private space available. That’s not good enough, for goodness sake, we’re meant to be in a professional role here.

This issue of ‘private space’ is important, not only in providing a climate of *intimacy* whereby relationships can develop, but also in terms of facilitating the confidential disclosure by students of any personal or academic barriers to their learning.

Finding (4): Regular contact, between the student and the same personal tutor, were seen as vital elements in facilitating the formation and maintenance of the student/personal tutor relationship.

(a) *Contact*

The data revealed that a further consideration in the forming and maintaining of the student/personal tutor relationship nominated by the *student respondents*, was that of ‘regular ongoing contact’. The issue of ‘*poor availability and access to personal tutors*’ has already been discussed earlier in this chapter. Suffice it to say, that the importance of ‘contact’ in relationship-forming is supported in

psychology literature by the ‘contact hypothesis’ of Zajonc (1968, cited in Hayes 1993:79) who suggests that “people would come to like others simply as a result of having contact with them”.

(c) *Continuity*

The data also revealed that both the first and second year *19+ part-time student respondents* regarded ‘*continuity*’ of working with the same personal tutor as very important. It was argued by the respondents that the sudden departure of a personal tutor after the first term, had caused major disruption and had not only lessened the quality and quantity of support available, but had also caused some students to leave the course, whilst others had become severely de-motivated. It is understandable that this ‘loss’, along with the inevitability of having to start a new relationship within a framework of limited tutorial contact time, if any, is not the best way to facilitate a meaningful student/personal tutor relationship.

Finding (5): The formation and maintenance of a positive, supportive student/personal tutor relationship, was viewed as an important contributory factor in facilitating a student's personal and academic development

Benefits

The data revealed that both *students and staff respondents* placed some significant value on the student/personal tutor relationship, with 86% of students giving positive feedback. Less support (although still significant at 66%) came from the first year *16-19 full-time students*. A reason for this may have been their reliance on peer support at school and that they were not yet familiar with the staff-delivered tutorial support system available in college.

Of interest within the data, is the high value that *staff respondents* placed on the relationship as a tool to motivate students, and improve their confidence to be

self-determining in moving their learning to a higher level. This is a surprising response, in view of staff respondents failing to nominate ‘motivation’ as a major ‘purpose of tutorials’ in an earlier section of this chapter. Nonetheless, this belief was picked up by a second year *19+ part-time student* who commented: “I think if you have a good working relationship, it only serves to encourage you to work harder and to do better, and to know that if you have a problem, you can discuss it”. (A2/I-10)

This perhaps highlights the key benefits of the formation of a close and trusting relationship between student and personal tutor, in that it can not only provide stability and consistency to a student’s time in college, but also make any referral for additional help more palatable to the student. With regard to a student’s personal development, it can improve self-esteem, self-belief, confidence and thereby also benefit students in terms of their academic achievements, as noted by one adult student (A2/I-6) who commented: “I think if I hadn’t had a little bit of support, encouragement really, making you believe in yourself, then I don’t think I would have got the results that I got”.

Summary

Many issues were raised within the data that have been discussed under the relevant headings. However, some issues can keep occurring, thus becoming underlying themes within a thesis. One such theme to emerge in this study was that of ‘*boundaries*’, particularly in terms of accessing the personal tutor outside formal tutorial times. Another example of this theme, was the extent to which a personal tutor should become involved in directly addressing a student’s personal problems, or whether they should refer to a specialist worker, which in turn raises a further issue of confidentiality boundaries.

Another theme to emerge was the ‘*preciousness*’ that students felt towards the *student/personal tutor relationship*. This revealed itself in several ways. Firstly, by their preference to treat their personal tutor as their ‘first port of call when

personal problems were hindering their studies, rather than be referred elsewhere for specialist help or to use ‘unknown staff’ at the proposed Tutorial Drop-in Centre. Secondly, their strong preference to share any personal problems within the private confines of the individual (1-1) tutorial rather than within a large group tutorial. Thirdly, their sense of anger when their personal tutor with whom they had forged a working relationship, was replaced by another member of staff.

LINKS TO OTHER RESEARCH

Research projects undertaken at other colleges of further education were reviewed and summarised in chapter 2. These reviews also considered the research undertaken by Martinez and Munday (1998) and by Green (2001).

The first point of interest to emerge was the diverse standard of reporting of These research projects, with one report being 7 pages long and another 58 pages in length, with any claim of ‘good results’ often not being substantiated with hard data. Secondly, because of their restricted LSDA focus, any reference made to personal tutoring was generally only made ‘*en passant*’. The third issue was that any views that were gathered by the researchers, tended to be those of staff and management rather than those of the students, thus providing a somewhat one-sided contribution to their findings. Consequently, any comparisons between my own research and that of others, is somewhat tenuous because of these differences in focus and the small number of similar studies involved. Nonetheless, it was possible to make some small links, but for the reasons outlined, these may need to be treated with some caution.

Similar findings

The impact of external and consequently internal *influences on tutorial provision* was noticeably strong across the various projects, in that standardisation seemed to be the current direction of service delivery. In terms of *tutorial style and content*, most colleges reviewed, tended to promote the large group tutorial as the

most appropriate vehicle to not only enforce their own agenda of stating college policies and procedures, but also as a way of delivering the standardised content recommended by the government within its funding methodology. Several colleges did highlight some concerns about the standardised content of tutorials in terms of its effect on student/personal tutor relationships, with Norton Radstock (2204:11) arguing that we need to “keep the emphasis on the quality of interaction, not the paperwork”. This contrasted with the view expressed by North Hertfordshire College (1999:3) that “chat was no longer enough, it was important to track student progress, have clear documentation and use tutorial time more effectively”.

With regard to *time allocated for tutorials*, there appeared across the colleges studied, a wide variation of practice. This was well demonstrated in the report from Doncaster College (2000:4) which commented that “within the college there existed a range of practice from no allocated time with staff giving tutorial support in breaks and lunch periods, to designated time with structured programmes”. Whether given formally or informally, a pattern emerged of full-time students usually receiving 2 hours per week, with little or none being allocated to part-time students.

Although little agreement was found on the appropriate contents of a *training* programme for personal tutors, there was a general agreement that such a programme was necessary. Green asserts that:

for tutoring to be successful, regardless of the systems and strategies in place, we must either recruit tutors with the commitment, experience and skills to be effective in the role, or we must train and support people to evolve into dual teacher/tutor roles.

(Green 2001:1)

Green (2001:5) goes on to add that “where training does occur it tends to focus on systems and paperwork – explicit skills training is quite exceptional”. This was re-enforced by the number of occasions that colleges mentioned items such

as planning, target-setting and organising.

On the topic of *assessing the needs* of students, several colleges were in favour of a holistic approach being adopted that would address both the personal and academic needs of students, whether they originated inside or outside the college. This was well summarised by the comments from Lewes College (1999:2), (noted in chapter 2), who stated that, “the key issue that we wished to address was finding a bridge between the student’s life outside college and the influence this was having on their learning programme”. The college further argued that such an approach would be best facilitated via the student/personal tutor relationship. Several other colleges made reference to the importance of the *student/personal tutor relationship*, and emphasised its importance to building self-esteem and confidence in students. North Birmingham College (2002:3) also stressed that such relationships need time to flourish when they gave the example that “as the course progressed and the relationship developed, the students felt they were also able to bring social/personal problems to the support worker as she had established an excellent rapport with them”.

In terms of the *role and responsibilities* of a personal tutor, it was regularly evident from the existing research on student retention matters, that there exists no recognised or clear general agreement about the *role* of a personal tutor. Nonetheless, a *small pattern* did emerge when it came to responsibilities, namely, induction, personal and academic support, College link-person, and academic and vocational progression guidance. Tensions were also noted on whether support of students with personal problems should be part of the role.

Little reporting was found of any significance, in the areas of *personal qualities*, *staff recruitment or staff support*, although some colleges noted a resistance by staff to being required to undertake the role of personal tutor (Doncaster College 2000:3), (Wisbech College 2002:5), (Crawley College 2004:5).

In the next chapter, the findings of my own research within the case-study college will be summarised, conclusions made, and recommendations for future

research offered. In addition, a review of the research methodology utilised in my research will be provided

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION, CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

This brief chapter is concerned with evaluating both the research process and the product. In doing so, it will identify whether the methodology chosen was apt for the task of addressing the research question and sub-questions. Further, it will summarise the research findings and conclusions whilst also indicating their possible relevance for the case study college. Finally, it will outline the implications for me, not only as a researcher and a tutoring practitioner, but also as a person.

EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Overall, in terms of the research methodology being *'fit for purpose'*, I identified potential hazards prior to commencing data collection, via the advice contained in the 'research literature', and as a consequence built into the *research design*, various strategies to either combat or minimise their effect, particularly in the area of subjectivity. Within the research design, I addressed the issues of validity (construct, internal and external) and reliability, and identified those features of the case-study college that would enable others to decide how similar or different the findings are to the contexts of similar kind. The data collection techniques were designed to progressively support the development of the research, and in conjunction with a purposeful sampling technique, spawned sufficient data to support findings and also serve as a springboard for any subsequent debate or research on the topic.

The data collected has also allowed links to be made with sub-topics, not least organisational micro-politics, that otherwise might have remained hidden, thus denying a subsequent opportunity of presenting a well-rounded picture of

contemporary personal tutoring in the case-study college. I also believe that the methodologies utilised, have enabled me to more than adequately address the research question and sub-questions posed at the beginning of this research. In addition, other surprise evidence emerged which served to expand the original line of enquiry and also provide topics for possible future research. The sampling was taken from all levels of the case study college, including the students, thus ensuring that contributions were obtained from people with different frames of reference within the organisation. The research was conducted utilising the sound ethical considerations outlined in chapter 3, and they were applied rigorously and consistently with all respondents.

Having spent considerable time thinking through the preparation and application of the operational aspects of the research design, it is perhaps not surprising that I did not encounter any major strategic problems, and any problems that did emerge, were of a practical nature within the data collection process.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE TUTORING PRACTICE AT THE CASE-STUDY COLLEGE

The empirical evidence that emerged from this study has tended to challenge the existing college view of what students most need in terms of tutorial support, and what personal tutors need in order to deliver a tutoring service that will best address those needs.

However, it was evident from the data that government funding arrangements for colleges continue to restrict the room for manoeuvre when management are deciding the destination of limited financial resources.

To this end, it may be difficult without making ‘sacrifices’ elsewhere, to meet the identified requirements of both students and staff in terms of:

- providing designated private tutorial rooms for students
- creating more allocated tutorial time, especially for part-time students
- designing and implementing a systematic personal tutor recruitment process
- allowing staff the time to attend a comprehensive personal tutor training programme
- making extra staff time available to support colleagues undertaking the role of a personal tutor
- providing finances to undertake comprehensive future research into both the role of a personal tutor and the tutorial system

The only thing feasible therefore, may be to review existing provision and re-arrange priorities after consultation with all stakeholders.

However, whilst some changes may involve some financial consideration, others might be achieved by reviewing operational practices, an example being the Tutorial Voucher System suggested by a member of the staff training personnel, whereby those students who are mainly self-directing in their studies, can donate their tutorial vouchers to those who require extra help.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AT THE CASE-STUDY COLLEGE

The original and specific contribution of this research to existing knowledge at the case study college may be demonstrated in four particular areas:

1. No comprehensive research, either formal or informal, has previously been undertaken at the case-study college, into reviewing the role of the personal tutor. The research has identified many tensions extant within the practice of personal tutoring at the case- study college, not least the piece-meal way in which the *personal tutor role* has tended to develop. By bringing together all the variations on the theme of personal tutoring

identified in this study, the scene is set for further research. Such research would hopefully lead to a dis-entangling of the current variable state of student support as delivered by personal tutors and all the other alternative college support roles that have recently emerged. This might then lead to the establishment of a single base-model of personal tutoring at the college, upon which other variations could then be possibly developed and co-ordinated.

2. It emerged from within the data that there was an absence of a formal and comprehensive programme of *staff training* and *practice support* system within the case-study college. The establishment of these two systems would prepare staff to deliver a quality approach to student support. In order to establish the type of training and practice support required by personal tutors, further enquiry would be needed.
3. This study has indicated how the development of a sound working *relationship between the student and personal tutor* can facilitate the assessment of student needs and thereby make a contribution to not only student retention and achievement, but also student success. It has also highlighted the need for role and relationship boundaries to be researched and established, firstly in terms of personal tutor availability, secondly in terms of addressing a student's personal barriers to learning, and thirdly, in terms of the 'status' of the relationship.
4. The research has also highlighted several problem areas within the *tutorial support system*. These include the need to identify the key purposes and attendant content of each tutorial session, along with the most appropriate delivery style. It has also identified some additional (rather than alternative) styles of offering support to students, examples being e-mail, telephone, texting, and drop-in. Also a further issue was identified in terms of insufficient tutorial time being allocated, with staff having to utilise time allocated for other purposes. All of these areas could perhaps benefit from further exploration and development.

Comment

It is apparent from this study, that there exists within the area of tutorial support, many perceptions of the tutorial support system and diverse opinions as to how the practice of this support may best be effected. There is agreement that the personal tutor is the key component in this process, but where disagreement does exist, is in delineating the actual role and responsibilities of the personal tutor. Whilst issues of recruitment, personal qualities, skills, training and practice support, are important, their relevance must of necessity, take second place to the primary task of establishing a generally negotiated and agreed model of personal tutoring, based on agreed values and tenets of professional practice. When judged by the comments of all respondents from all levels of college including the students, then for many, the existing model is not working, because its current role and purposes are too broad and too vague, too 'top-down (centralised) and not bottom-up' (localised), thereby causing some confusion not only for those who deliver the service, but also for the consumers. In other words, 'the old arithmetic is not working'. This point would seem to be under-pinned by a comment made during the research interview with the Vice Principal in charge of personal tutoring at the case-study college, when he reflected: "From my point of view, I think we haven't got tutorial support sussed, either for full-time or part-time". (M/I-2):

Such a comment, from a very senior manager who has overall responsibility for personal tutoring in the case-study college, would seem to suggest that there is a need to review the situation, and possibly move to a new improved model of personal tutoring based on the contemporary and comprehensive needs of all the political, managerial, professional, and consumer stakeholders.

Ideally the process should be one of considered reflection and debate amongst all the stakeholders including students. Such a debate on the tutoring system within college, might be enhanced even further, if it was underpinned by some formal research, possibly via the findings of an independent, external research team, pursuing those areas already identified in this chapter.

Any research undertaken would need to consider the whole picture and be undertaken in stages. The first stage would be to ask students what they need in order to feel fully supported in their academic endeavours, which may mean adopting a holistic approach to assessment of needs. Only then could a system of tutorial support be created that clearly identified the roles of all involved, with the personal tutor as the fulcrum of service delivery. The next step would be to establish a clear and 'agreed' job description, followed by a recruitment strategy, a formal training programme, and the development of an ongoing system of professional practice support.

Breaking new ground and challenging the status quo can be quite contentious. However, the fact that there exist current differing perceptions, is in some ways quite healthy, and if managed correctly, a way forward could be found to benefit all concerned. The common ground is the value placed on education as a way of enhancing individual lives, as noted in the following comment:

My recent journeys in the world of Further Education have provided me with a 1001 histories of changed lives. As with most good stories, they usually describe the conquering of fear, a battle against odds, the discovery of the self, as well as, the acquisition of skills and knowledge.

Baroness Helena Kennedy of The Shaws

Learning Works, The Kennedy Report 1999:12

IMPLICATIONS FOR ME

(a) *as a researcher*

The main area of learning as a researcher, was to accept frustrations both externally and internally. I found it difficult to cope with the fact that some publications seem to go out of print very quickly and thus required a lot of time to track down. A further frustration was that many colleges including the case-study college, do not have very sophisticated information retrieval systems, and

therefore a lot of potential lines of enquiry literally ‘dried up’, as staff who might have thrown some light on a topic, had left the organisation, some disappearing beyond trace. The internal or personal frustration, was my over-optimism as to the time it would take to complete certain tasks, whether it is a routine task such as categorising data, or a more complex task of writing the thesis. My over-riding concern throughout the research was with any subjectivity that may have crept in, due to my role as a personal tutor. However, the procedures I outlined in chapter 3 offered some cross-check on this effect, as far as it is ever possible. I also came to acknowledge that taking a short break, even of only a few hours, could quickly refresh one’s thought processes, especially when ‘drowning’ in masses of data.

(b) *as a personal tutor*

The main lesson learned, was that because I tried to live out my values of empowering people and travelling at their pace, this involved me in giving more time to tutorial support than was formally allocated by the college. This then placed me under personal pressure in other areas, not least allocating some time to psychologically and emotionally unwind. This could have been avoided to some extent, by being clearer to students at the beginning of the course, about the limits of my role. I could also have made it clearer, that our work within the tutorial session was a partnership, and that both had to prepare for the session and not just myself.

This research also demonstrated to me the benefit of sharing my tutorial practice concerns with other personal tutors, and thereby relieving my stress, by discovering that such concerns are not mine alone. Also, that by professionally isolating myself, I was carrying a personal load un-necessarily. Further to this, my research allowed me to talk privately with members of management, thus allowing me to realise that we all shared the same aspirations for students, along with the methods required to support these aims.

(c) *as a person*

I have learned to appreciate that I have inner qualities of commitment, determination, self-motivation, and endurance. However, the hardest lesson has been, that at times, I have had to promote my own needs above those of friends and family, something that I have found particularly difficult. I have also learned the importance of creating a sensible work-life balance. However, despite writing a thesis being a fairly lonely experience, I have found that it has drawn me closer to family, friends, and work colleagues, as they have exercised much patience in listening to my anxieties and frustrations without complaint.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

Main conclusions

- *All stakeholders need to agree on the purpose of personal tutoring before other aspects of service delivery, such as tutorial style, content, and availability, can be considered*
- *All stakeholders need to agree on the role and responsibilities of the personal tutor, before issues of recruitment, training, and practice support systems can be addressed*
- *The establishment of a positive student/personal tutor relationship, depends on selecting staff with the appropriate personal qualities and skills, and having in place, a range of supportive resources, policies and practice guidelines*

Summary

It has been noted within this thesis that there is a lack of clarity and agreement in various areas of *tutoring provision* within the case study college. Much focus has

been placed, usually for funding reasons, on the needs of the *16-19 full-time students*, often at the expense of the needs of the *19+ part-time students*.

However, this thesis has shown that older students (19+) have both similar and different needs to the younger students (16-19). In addition to belonging to one of these categories, students also have individual and unique needs based on their lives outside college, past and present, educational and non-educational. It would appear from the findings of this research, that these needs go largely ignored because no specific methodology exists for accessing such information. However, although it would be an intrusion of privacy to seek to delve too much into such issues at enrolment, they might be accessed fairly quickly via the establishment of a trusting and psychologically safe tutorial relationship. However, as noted within the data, such relationships require a jointly agreed purpose, regular contact, privacy and continuity.

Throughout this research, there has been much discussion about the importance of the *role of the personal tutor* in the whole process of student support, particularly by members of senior management, yet the role remains one that is generally fairly ill-defined with no agreed recruitment criteria, no formal 'practice-focused' training programme, and no formalised practice support systems in existence, other than via the 'misunderstood' Lead Tutor role. If the case-study college wishes to comprehensively address the issue of student retention and continue to promote the role of personal tutor as being, (to coin popular FE jargon), '*at the heart of what we do*' in offering students a quality support service based on need 'as expressed by the students', then perhaps the time has come as noted earlier, for a comprehensive review of what is currently on offer.

During my research in the case-study college, I was surprised and impressed, at how much agreement and vision existed amongst staff at a 'private level' as to how the role should develop. It is when staff and management slip into organisational cultural roles, that barriers to progress seem to exist, leading often to inertia in terms of service development. The interviews with staff provided evidence that there was much good 'grass roots' practice around in the case-

study college, but there appeared to be a 'reticence' to share such positive work. College documentation showed that many good 'systems' or 'strategies' had been introduced by management, but they tend to be developed in a piecemeal and slow fashion, with not all interested or experienced parties having participated. However, I would posit that the basic building blocks exist in the case-study college for developing a forward-looking model of personal tutoring.

The main question seems to be, who will provide the leadership for such innovation. Who will start the 'big debate' students, personal tutors or managers? Schein (cited in Peters and Waterman 1982:200) states that "the new idea either finds a champion or dies". However, with so much reliance currently being placed upon personal tutors to promote and sustain the psychological contract between the institution (College) and the individual (student) within the tutorial support system, any review of the personal tutor role may be a 'nettle' that must be grasped if the case-study college is to sustain its current commitment to assuring quality standards and high levels of customer care.

Consequently, it is against this background, that I offer my thesis as making a limited but unique contribution to exploring the role of a personal tutor in the case-study college.

"The role you have, does not only affect you, it inevitably involves other people. The more you can bring their understanding of your role closer to your own, the better you will be able to perform it". Handy (1990:77)

SPECIAL NOTE:

Any educational developments, particularly those related to personal tutoring, which took place after the cessation of my research operations in 2003, either at the national or local level, have been recorded in an Annexe to this thesis, which can be found on pages 252-267

APPENDICES

Appendix 1.	Ethical Principles that guided the study
Appendix 2.	Questioning Route (Focus Groups)
Appendix 3.	Interview Schedule (students)
Appendix 4.	Interview Schedule (staff)
Appendix 5.	Example of a taped interview transcript

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES that guided the study

PARTICIPANT PRE-REQUISITES

- **Competence** – participants must be responsible, mature individuals who will make correct decisions if given relevant information, and who will therefore be able to participate to the level of competence required
- **Comprehension** - participants must fully understand the nature of the research being undertaken
- **Voluntarism** – participants must have freedom to choose to participate or not
- **Availability** – participants must be free to participate

RIGHTS OF PARTICIPANTS

1. FULL INFORMATION

- **Informed consent** – participants have the right to be as fully informed about the research as is practically possible prior to agreeing to be involved

2. SECURITY

- **Privacy** – participants have the right to have their privacy protected in terms of :
 - the sensitivity of information given
 - the setting being researched
 - the eventual dissemination of information
- **Anonymity** – information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity
- **Confidentiality** – although researchers know the source of information given, this connection will in no way be made public

3. ONGOING INVOLVEMENT

- **Consultation** – participants have the right to check the recording of their input to verify its accuracy

4. OPEN-ENDED PARTICIPATION

- **Withdrawal** - participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any point in time

GAINING ACCESS & ACCEPTANCE
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Gaining access to an organisation, and acceptance by those granting permission, will necessitate being clear about the nature and scope of the research, in terms of :

- Aims
- Practical implications
- Design methods
- Procedures
- Nature and size of sample group
- Tests to be administered and how
- What activities are to be observed
- What subjects are to be interviewed
- Observational needs
- Time involved
- Degree of disruption envisaged
- Arrangements to guarantee privacy, anonymity and confidentiality
- Role of feedback
- Overall timetable
- Any assistance required

FOCUS GROUPS

QUESTIONING ROUTE

PHASE 1

- (a) OPENING QUESTION (2 minutes) (All)

What is the first thing that comes into your head when you hear the phrase 'personal tutorials'?

- (b) INTRODUCTORY QUESTION (3 minutes) (1 x 1)

How often have you made use of personal tutorials during your course?

- (c) TRANSITION QUESTION (5 minutes) (1x1)

Can you describe your own experience of personal tutorials during your course?

PHASE 2 (Moderator to clarify points made, as they are made) (All)

KEY QUESTIONS (10 minutes each question)

- (a) *What contribution do personal tutorials make in helping students to be successful?*
- (b) *Which specific aspects of personal tutorials are most beneficial to being successful as a student?*
- (c) *What expectations do you have of a Personal Tutor?*
- (d) *How would you describe an 'ideal' student/personal tutor relationship?*

PHASE 3 (10 minutes) (All)

(a) ALL THINGS CONSIDERED QUESTION

If you had one minute to talk to a new student about personal tutorials and personal tutors, what would you say?

(b) SUMMARY QUESTION

Moderator gives a Summary of previous discussion and then asks:-

How well does my Summary capture what has been said?

(c) INSURANCE QUESTION

Moderator gives a short overview of the purpose of the research and then asks:

Have we missed anything, Is there anything that we should have discussed but didn't?

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

DOCTORATE IN EDUCATION

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
STUDENTS

Alec C. Carrotte

June 2001

INTERVIEW PRE-AMBLE

BEFORE WE COMMENCE THE INTERVIEW, CAN I ASSURE YOU
THAT YOUR ANONYMITY IS GUARANTEED

AND

ANYTHING YOU SAY
WILL BE TREATED IN ABSOLUTE CONFIDENCE

THE ONLY PERSON WHO MIGHT READ THIS INTERVIEW, IS MY
STUDY SUPERVISOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

THIS TAPE WILL BE ERASED
AS SOON AS I HAVE COMPLETED MY COURSE OF STUDY

SECTION 'A'

Matching student needs with the tutorial support system offered

1. WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE PURPOSE OF TUTORIALS?
2. LOOKING BACK TO THE BEGINNING OF THE COURSE, WHAT TUTORIAL SUPPORT DO YOU THINK YOU NEEDED IN ORDER TO BE SUCCESSFUL?
3. CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE TUTORIAL SUPPORT YOU WERE ACTUALLY OFFERED DURING YOUR TIME ON THE COURSE?
4. WERE SOME PARTS OF THE SUPPORT MORE HELPFUL THAN OTHERS IN MEETING YOUR NEEDS, AND CAN YOU SAY WHY YOU FOUND THOSE BITS MORE HELPFUL?
5. WERE THERE ANY BITS OF THE TUTORIAL SUPPORT THAT WERE DEFINITELY NOT HELPFUL AND CAN YOU SAY WHY?
- 6.(a) DID YOU EXPERIENCE ANY SMALL PROBLEMS IN THE EARLY PART OF YOUR COURSE, AND IF SO, DID YOU DISCUSS THESE IN THE 1-1 TUTORIALS?
OR DID YOU LEAVE IT UNTIL THE SMALL PROBLEMS BECAME BIGGER PROBLEMS?
- (b) IF YOU LEFT THESE PROBLEMS UNTIL LATER IN THE COURSE, CAN YOU SAY WHAT PREVENTED YOU FROM SEEKING HELP EARLIER FROM YOUR PERSONAL TUTOR?
7. IF THIS IS YOUR SECOND YEAR ON THE COURSE, HOW AND WHY HAVE YOUR SUPPORT NEEDS CHANGED, IF AT ALL?

SECTION 'B'

Role and responsibilities of the Personal Tutor

1. WHEN YOU STARTED THE COURSE, WHAT EXPECTATIONS DID YOU HAVE REGARDING SUPPORT FROM YOUR PERSONAL TUTOR?
2. HOW DO YIOU FEEL ABOUT PERSONAL TUTORS OFFERING HELP WITH PERSONAL AND DOMESTIC ISSUES, IN ADDITION TO ACADEMIC ISSUES?
3. HOW CAN PERSONAL TUTORS HELP TO CREATE A GOOD LEARNING ATMOSPHERE IN THE STUDENT GROUP?
4. OF ALL THE TASKS THAT A PERSONAL TUTOR PERFORMS, WHICH TASKS HAVE YOU FOUND MOST USEFUL IN HELPING YOU TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

SECTION 'C'

Relationship between student and Personal Tutor

1. WHAT BEARING HAS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PERSONAL TUTOR HAD, ON YOUR COURSE RESULTS, IF ANY?
2. (a) IF ANY PERSONAL OR DOMESTIC PROBLEMS AFFECTED YOUR ABILITY TO STUDY ON THE COURSE, DID YOU FEEL ABLE TO SHARE THESE WITH YOUR PERSONAL TUTOR?

(b) *IF NOT, WHAT PREVENTED YOU FROM SHARING THOSE ISSUES?*
3. (a) IN YOUR 1-1 TUTORIALS, DID YOU FEEL AN EQUAL PARTNER WITH YOUR PERSONAL TUTOR?

(b) *IF NOT, WHAT SORT OF THINGS MADE YOU FEEL UNEQUAL?*
4. WHAT SORT OF PERSONAL QUALITIES DO YOU EXPECT A PERSONAL TUTOR TO POSSESS?
5. CAN YOU DESCRIBE ANY OF THESE QUALITIES THAT YOUR OWN PERSONAL TUTOR POSSESSED?
6. CAN YOU SUGGEST ANY WAYS IN WHICH A PERSONAL TUTOR CAN DEVELOP A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH A STUDENT?
7. (a) DID YOUR MOTIVATION AND CONFIDENCE SUFFER AT ALL DURING THE COURSE, AND IF SO, DID YOU USE YOUR PERSONAL TUTOR FOR SUPPORT?

(b) *IF NOT, CAN YOU SAY WHY?*

SECTION 'D'

Evaluate the contribution of the tutorial support system to student achievement

1. IN ORDER TO CREATE MORE TUTORIAL TIME ON THE COURSE, WOULD YOU HAVE BEEN PREPARED TO RECEIVE LECTURES IN LARGER GROUPS, FOR EXAMPLE, IN A LECTURE THEATRE?
2. (a) DURING THE COURSE, DID YOU EXPERIENCE ANY BARRIERS THAT PREVENTED YOU FROM MAKING FULL USE OF THE TUTORIAL SUPPORT OFFERED?

(b) *IF SO, WHAT DID YOU DO, IN ORDER TO OVERCOME THESE BARRIERS?*

(c) DID ANYONE HELP YOU TO OVERCOME THESE BARRIERS AND IF SO, WHO WAS IT?
3. CAN YOU COMMENT ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE TUTORIAL SYSTEM, IN TERMS OF YOUR FINAL COURSE RESULTS?
4. WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE BETTER OR DIFFERENTLY TO MAKE THE TUTORIAL SUPPORT MORE EFFECTIVE FOR YOU?

THANK YOU FOR HELPING WITH THIS RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

DOCTORATE IN EDUCATION

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

STAFF

Alec C. Carrotte

June 2001

INTERVIEW PRE-AMBLE

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THIS TAPE WILL BE ERASED
AS SOON AS I HAVE COMPLETED MY COURSE OF STUDY

SECTION 'A'

Matching student needs with the tutorial support system offered

1. WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE OVERALL AIM OF PROVIDING A TUTORIAL SYSTEM WITHIN A COURSE OF ACADEMIC STUDY?
2. WHO OR WHAT DO YOU THINK HAS THE MAIN INFLUENCE ON THE PROVISION OF A TUTORIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM IN COLLEGE?
3. CAN YOU DESCRIBE WHAT YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE MAIN FUNCTIONS OF AN ACTUAL PERSONAL TUTORIAL SESSION?
4. WHICH TUTORIAL STYLE DO YOU THINK BEST WORKS WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF STUDENT?

(Part-time, Full-time, young students, adult students)

(Large group, small group, individual, Drop-in)

5. WHAT BENEFITS DO YOU THINK STUDENTS GET FROM THE VARIOUS STYLES OF TUTORIALS?

(Large group, small group, individual, Drop-in)

6. WHO SHOULD SET THE AGENDA FOR:

- (a) Personal Tutorials
- (b) Group Tutorials

7. HOW DOES A PERSONAL TUTOR KNOW AT WHAT STAGE TO REFER A STUDENT WITH PERSONAL PROBLEMS, TO A SPECIALIST WORKER?

SECTION 'B'

Role and responsibilities of a Personal Tutor

1. WHAT IS YOUR PERCEPTION OF THE KEY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PERSONAL TUTOR?
2. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT PERSONAL TUTORS OFFERING HELP WITH PERSONAL AND DOMESTIC PROBLEMS ISSUES, IN ADDITION TO ACADEMIC ISSUES?
3. HOW CAN A PERSONAL TUTOR HELP TO CREATE A GOOD LEARNING ATMOSPHERE IN THE PERSONAL TUTORIAL SESSION?
4. HOW 'AVAILABLE' SHOULD A PERSONAL TUTOR BE TO STUDENTS?

SECTION 'C'

Relationship between student and Personal Tutor

1. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE AN 'IDEAL' STUDENT/PERSONAL TUTOR RELATIONSHIP?
2. CAN YOU SUGGEST WAYS IN WHICH A PERSONAL TUTOR CAN DEVELOP A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH A STUDENT?
3. WHAT SORT OF PERSONAL QUALITIES AND SKILLS DO YOU THINK ARE IMPORTANT FOR A PERSONAL TUTOR TO POSSESS?
4. WHY DO YOU THINK SOME STUDENTS DO NOT USE, OR INAPPROPRIATELY USE PERSONAL TUTORIALS?
5. CAN YOU SUGGEST HOW A GOOD STUDENT/PERSONAL TUTOR RELATIONSHIP MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

SECTION 'D'

Evaluate the contribution of the Personal Tutorial system to student achievement

1. HOW IMPORTANT TO A STUDENT'S ACHIEVEMENT, IS THEIR USAGE OF THE PERSONAL TUTORIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM?
2. WHAT SORT OF INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS COULD PREVENT THE PERSONAL TUTORIAL SYSTEM FROM WORKING EFFECTIVELY?
3. HOW CAN THE COLLEGE ENSURE THAT IT PROVIDES EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL STUDENTS, REGARDLESS OF STATUS, TO HAVE ACCESS TO A SYSTEM OF QUALITY PERSONAL TUTORIAL SUPPORT?
4. HOW DO YOU THINK THE CURRENT PERSONAL TUTORIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM COULD BE IMPROVED FOR THE BENEFIT OF STUDENTS?
5. HOW CAN COLLEGE MANAGEMENT BETTER FACILTATE THE ROLE OF BTHE PERSONAL TUTOR?

SECTION 'E'

Additional comments

1. ARE THERE ANY OTHER COMMENTS OR OPINIONS THAT YOU WOULD WISH TO OFFER ABOUT PERSONAL TUTORING IN THE COLLEGE?

THANK YOU FOR HELPING WITH THIS RESEARCH

TAPED INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Reference = STP/I-1

TAPE 5a/5b

SECTION A MATCHING STUDENT NEEDS WITH THE TUTORIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM OFFERED

Q1. I would first of all like to look at matching student needs with the tutorial support system offered. What do you think is the overall aim of providing a tutorial system within a course of academic study, the primary function?

A1 Right, the overall aim is to provide a mechanism through which the student can receive all the support they require in order to achieve their educational goals within the resources of the college.

Q2. Who or what do you think has the main influence on the provision of a Tutorial support system in college, including external forces as well as internal ones?

A2. I think in this college there's a number of influences which compete. The curriculum strategy over the past couple of years has been trying to articulate a tutorial policy and to provide through the lead tutor partnership some kind of consistency, but then there are heads of schools who have a different set of expectations about what tutors do, and sometimes those expectations are more to do with course administration than providing support to the students in order for them to make appropriate progress on their courses.

Q. When you said consistency, I was just about to ask you consistency of what. Is it consistency of hours?

A I think consistency of all things, consistency in terms of the time that's spent, consistency in terms of the expectations about roles and responsibilities, about the emphasis that the head of school would like the "tutor" to take, and also influence from the staff themselves, you know, what they perceive a tutorial to be. Often it's an either or, either providing all the necessary administration functions required to enable the course to proceed smoothly, you know looking after registers and timetables, giving inductions.

Q. You've obviously mentioned there about certain various levels. Which level do you think is the main influence?

A. I'd like to say it's the curriculum strategy, from the Vice Principal downwards, and I think, to some extent, that's beginning to influence the thinking at various levels because one of the key players in the curriculum strategy has been XX, who has got a clear focus on tutorial being one of the main tools through which students can achieve their goals.

Q3. Can you describe what you consider to be the main functions of an actual personal one to one tutorial session?

A3. Monitoring progress, reviewing where progress is less than that which was planned, trying to identify any barriers through any circumstances which are impeding progress, then to maybe begin to look at possible strategies for the student to overcome those impediments and then move forward, identify any specific support that the college can provide and then if that's within the remit of the tutor to make any necessary arrangements. Or to motivate the student to make those arrangements for themselves.

Q4. Can I combine two questions in one now. Which tutorial style do you think best works with different types of student in terms of part time, full time, young students, adult students, large group, small group, individual, drop in?

A4 I think it depends on the characteristics of the students in a group, in a tutor group. Some students, adult students are quite happy I think to work in large groups. They are more socially aware and able to conduct themselves in group discussions, but equally they are quite happy and I think they seek - in fact they are quite demanding in a one to one - there's much more of an expectation of something happening in a one to one with an adult. Younger students tend to be less socially aware and it's harder work to do large groups, so sometimes smaller group work works better with younger students.

Q5. Have you thought about the part time, full time need in usage?

A5. Younger part time students, sometimes there's an expectation. They don't necessarily need tutorial, and I think they do. All students need a tutorial. I think tutorials need to be a neater focus on the ability of the students to cope with the courses, because part time students are often given a less equitable deal than full time students. A lot of the resources in the college are geared towards providing for full time students, so I think a tutorial provides an opportunity for a part time student to express their concerns, identify the things that are impeding their progress and then almost an opportunity to advocate on behalf of the students to try and ensure that the appropriate resources are available for part time students but it's difficult because sometimes the management of the college have in their mind that full time students need more resources and therefore that's where those resources go.

Q6. We've talked about the various types of group. Who do you think should set the agenda for personal tutorials and group tutorials?

A6. I think it's a senior manager, a Vice Principal really to set the agenda to the line management and it's a two way process. First of all it's finding out from the students through the tutorial process what the tutorial needs of the student are and to ensure that each layer of management down to the tutor has a clear understanding of what the tutor's role is, and then to ensure that the time resources and any other physical resources are there to enable the tutorial to work properly. The problem with tutorials is that it stems from the fact that some of the managers see tutorials as course administration, and that's all they require really from the member of staff.

Q. And it would be a member of staff that sets the agenda. How do you feel about that?

A. I think that's wrong. I think the agenda should be set based on the needs of the students, not the one set by management or staff.

Q. And that's both at one-to-one and group levels?

A. Oh yes. Because the tutorial is there for the student, and therefore all of the resources must be deployed for the benefit of the students.

Q. Who do you think actually owns the tutorials?

A. I'd say that 70 percent the student, 30 percent the staff, because there are certain parts of the tutorial where the students might want something in the tutorial but that's not what they need in a tutorial, so 30 percent of the tutorial is the student working with the tutor to differentiate between their wants and their needs. In other words, they help the student to identify the real need to focus on. The tutor needs to set the agenda for that, but then it's the 70 percent with the student setting the.....

Q. So the tutor, as far as you see it, would be setting the boundaries and the areas that would be available and then the actual specific small picture area would be for the student?

A. Yes.

Q7. How does a personal tutor know at what stage to refer a student with personal problems to a specialist worker?

A. The corporate answer would be that the tutorial policy and the roles and responsibilities would identify some of the broad indicators that a personal tutor would look out for, then a staff development programme should work through a process of up-skilling the tutor in order to be able to identify the indicators.

SECTION B - ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PERSONAL TUTOR

Q1. I'll come back to staff training later if I may. Can I move on to looking more specifically at the role and responsibilities of a personal tutor. What is your perception of the key roles and responsibilities of a personal tutor?

A1. My perception is the personal tutor's responsibility is two-fold. They have a responsibility to the college in order to ensure that the students achieve the primary learning goal, so in other words they join a course and the tutor's responsibility to the college to ensure the students complete and achieve. But then the responsibility of the student is to ensure the college deploys its teaching resources in an appropriate way for the benefit of the student, that the teaching is at the right level for them, that the course is appropriate for their ability to cope, that there are other resources that can be brought in to support the student. In other words, it's identifying the factors which either impede or enhance the student's learning whilst they're on the course.

Q2. You mentioned earlier about the different things that occur in the tutorial. How do you feel about personal tutors offering help with personal and domestic issues in addition to academic issues?

A2. I see that a tutor would have skills and expertise, knowledge, which would be used in a tutorial to help the student to identify appropriate solutions to problems, but I don't see that it's a tutor's role to provide those solutions, but to work with the student in order to identify the options that are available and then maybe provide some support in terms of advocacy, in other words if the tutor feels that they could speak on behalf of the student to an agency or specialist support worker, then they could do that.

Q. So you see the role of a tutor mainly as a signpost, you can go there, you can go there, and monitoring the help? A. Yes.

Q3. How do you think a personal tutor can help to create a good learning atmosphere in the personal one to one tutorial session?

A3. I think it's important that the tutor and the individual student know clearly, so I'm talking about an individual, that every student knows what the personal tutorial session is for, the clear aims and objectives. Clear aims and objectives and that the tutor understands that the student understands the aims and objectives, so the students can see the relevance of the tutorial session, regardless of whether it's an individual one to one, small group or large group, that there are very clear aims and objectives for the session, that they're understood by everybody. That the tutor uses his or her personal skills and attributes to manage the session in order to provide a good learning atmosphere. It's about establishing rapport, it's listening, paraphrasing and proving a sense of mutual respect between the tutor and the tutees.

Q4. I think probably we'll be coming on to particular skills later on. How available should a personal tutor be to students?

A4. I think there should be an understanding of availability that works around the tutor's workload, that a tutor can't drop a workload in order to be a tutor for an individual student, but it's about an organisational responsibility to provide a tutorial support to students through a variety of mechanisms, that within a tutor's workload there should be clear times when a tutee can come to a tutor for help and guidance. It could be negotiated, but it could be limited by a workload or by structure.

Q. What do you feel about students who are catching students at the end of a lecture for quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, ad-hoc?

A. I think tutors need to discipline themselves to manage their time effectively, and that means managing the students so that the student manages their time. It is a negotiation. I find this with certain groups of students. There is an assumption that the tutor is always there for them, wherever they are they can catch the tutor in the corridor and that tutor's got to stop and deal with the problem.

Q. If a student perceived a problem as big as far as they are concerned, and the tutor said, "Well I can't see you now," how do you think the student would perceive that?

A. I think it's a case of, again, clarifying expectations, about what the tutor support is and the relationship between the tutor and their workload and the tutor and their tutor group, and also if there were the appropriate support mechanisms that a tutor could say, "If it's really important, go to the office and speak to the secretary and she'll make you an appointment to see me at the earliest opportunity, or if it's really urgent we'll find someone to talk to you now." There's an element here I think about the tutorial role, that it is not an individual tutor working in isolation, but a team providing a whole range of support mechanisms that the tutor can access, but you know it's a team effort.

SECTION C - RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENT AND PERSONAL TUTOR

Q1. Can I move on now to the actual relationship between the student and personal tutor. How would you describe an ideal student/personal tutor relationship?

A1. It would be one where there are absolutely crystal clear understandings about the relationship. That the tutee, the student knows exactly what resources the tutor has access to provide tutorial support, knows exactly what the basic aims and objectives of the tutorial programme are, what the purpose of individual tutorials is, what the purpose of group tutorials is, and the purpose of larger group tutorials is.

Q. And those purposes would be defined by who?

A. It depends on the student, on the course that they're on and on the characteristics of that course, but I think there are elements where there can be a negotiated tutorial provision which sits somewhere between what the college wants the tutorial to do, and what the student wants from the tutorial.

Q2. Can you suggest ways in which a personal tutor can develop a good relationship with a student?

A2. I think tutors come in a variety of different shapes and sizes, not physically, but characteristically, that each of them has their own personality traits, personal attributes, communication styles, and the relationship with the student starts off with a clear set of principles which are about mutual respect, while developing a rapport, mutual respect, listening to the students, ensuring that what the students are telling you is what you understand, so feeding back, paraphrasing, rephrasing, and using those kind of skills to ensure that there is a continuing understanding about the role of the tutor.

Q. So if I can summarise what I think you've been saying to me, it's really having the listening skills?

A. It's having listening skills, it's using them, it's having knowledge about the kinds of support mechanisms that are available and ensuring that the students understand all the time the purpose of the tutorial. Some tutorials might require a very, very hard line approach from the tutor. Lazy student syndrome, you know, I use the terms "hard" and "soft" tutoring, but sometimes not all personal tutors have got the characteristics to have a hard or soft, they might be able to do one or the other. Some of them can, but it could be that some students require a different style of tutoring that that tutor can't deliver, so therefore this tutor has available to them some other resources, some other support, an individual member of staff who can do

that. It could be a head of school, it could be someone in student services, but it's ensuring that everybody understands how the tutorial support will be provided and that the tutor is in fact the lens through which the tutorial focus is made. They're not all of the support, they're just the access, the gateway, a portal, a signpost, a series of signposts.

Q. So would you see yourself central to the student support system. Is it the various services around the college and the tutor is just a referee, or is the actual focus of support the actual tutor?

A. I think the focus of support is the tutor, because it's through the tutor that the identification of the support needs takes place, but sometimes some of the support issues that students have are so subtle that it can only be identified through someone who has a very strong relationship with the student, and if that relationship is there then the tutor is absolutely pivotal.

Q3. What sort of personal qualities and skill, which we talked about earlier, do you think are important for a personal tutor to possess, perhaps whilst recognising not all people possess those?

A3. We mentioned listening skills and I think listening skills is probably one of the main skills and qualities, the ability to listen patiently, but also to listen in a structured way in order to be able to negotiate the student to the point at the appropriate time rather than just listening and letting the student talk around an issue, but to actually bring the discussion to the point. So there's listening, but there's also negotiation skills as well, you know to get the student to that point. Also problem solving skills.

Q4. Despite the wonderful things we've talked about, why do you think some students don't use, or sometimes inappropriately use, personal tutorials, the one to ones?

A4. I think students with particular types of needs, with very difficult personal circumstances, or maybe with a history of difficulties, or with as yet unidentified learning needs, ones which haven't emerged yet, often see tutorials as a therapy, a counselling service, an instantly available service.

Q. Some might see it to imply some sort of stigma?

A. Yes, and then there are other issues which are to do with the way the personal tutor has presented the tutorial to the students and there aren't clear understandings and expectations about the role of the tutorial system, maybe because the tutor themselves doesn't have a clear understanding from their point of view or maybe the head of school or a line manager has set a different context, where the tutor's role is more of an administrative role, function, so the tutor then has to operate a more informal secondary tutorial system.

Q. How much do you think tutors should be pro-active in strongly encouraging students to use tutorials, and in particular the ones that are probably more capable students, as well as the less capable ones? Should students have a choice, to self-determine?

A. I think there's an element there, I mentioned earlier on, for negotiation, that there are degrees of freedom in negotiating, especially for part time students, so maybe on shorter hour courses their tutorial might need to be focussed towards progress on the course with less emphasis on personal circumstances and personal issues, but the tutor might see their lack of progress as having a more personal nature to it. So there's negotiation involved I think, based on the format and structure that the college would want the tutorial to be, but then the tutor working with the students to identify the best way.

Q5. Can you suggest how a good student/personal tutor relationship might contribute to student achievement? In other words, how important is that relationship to a student's outcome?

A5. I think it's vital, I think it's almost, to me, an embarrassment that a college places the management of its resources towards the management of physical things like rooms, money and other resources, instead of it being directed toward the management of the student learning experience, and where the role of the tutor is almost the single factor which distinguishes between success and no success.

SECTION D - EVALUATE THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PERSONAL TUTORIAL SYSTEM TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Q1. If I can now move on to the final section of evaluating the contribution of the personal tutorial system to student achievement overall. How important to a student's achievement is their usage of the personal tutorial system? I know you recognise that some students do get by without ever having a tutorial.

A1. Yes, but I think the unasked question there is how much further would a student have got if they had had access to an effective tutorial system, and I think if we're an average college delivering an average standard of curriculum, how much more effective, how much more successful would students be if the tutorial system was absolutely focussed on the achievement of students, and I think having seen some of the projects in other colleges where effective tutorials work, I think we need to invest much more time and effort into the tutorial in the management of tutors.

Q. What you're saying is if the tutorial is desirable and effective in meeting their needs, as perceived and stated by the students, then the usage would be almost over-use probably sometimes by students?

A. Yes, I think so.

Q2. What sort of institutional barriers could prevent the personal tutorial system from working effectively, do you think?

A2. OK, from the top down. A lack of a clear understanding in the senior management team of the importance of the tutorial, and then the communication of that importance to the managers down to the tutors. So in other words, every manager in the organisation has a clear understanding of how an effective tutorial system should work.

Q. So you're saying if there's no personal tutorial ethos and philosophy at the top, that it will not perforce down to the staff and it would be buried?

A. Yes. And also, it's about rewarding the effort that the tutors make in order to encourage the students to achieve their goals, because sometimes the difference between success and failure is the tutorial system and where it is effective it ought to be rewarded in terms of time and in terms of other reward mechanisms, like personal development.

Q3. Can I look at how the college can ensure that it provides equal opportunities for all students, regardless of status, part time or full time, to have access to a system of quality personal tutorial support?

A3 In the first instance it needs to be clear in the student's understanding of their entitlement to an appropriate learning experience, one that will enable them to achieve their learning goals, and so in recognising that a college needs to have a very clear policy with clear roles and responsibilities for students, and then a way of ensuring that resources are deployed properly, and bearing in mind that some tutors don't necessarily have the skills or the inclination to be tutors, but they are placed in those positions because of their course administration skills.

Q4. I think that leads us quite nicely onto the next question I was going to ask you, how do you think the current personal tutorial support system could be improved for the benefit of students, if you had a magic wand? You did actually mention, I think, about some people may not have the attitude or desire to be tutors and others probably lack training.

A4. I think it should start from an articulation of what skills, characteristics, personal attributes that a tutor needs to be able to deliver a tutorial effectively, and then to really recruit staff to those roles. It shouldn't automatically be assumed that someone can be a tutor, they need to be selected properly on the basis of a job description, and then they also need to be trained in some of the systems that they will need to administer, and in some areas they may need to develop personal skills and attributes that might require changes in behaviour and attitudes to make them a rounded tutor. But then also the tutorial system needs to identify that there are certain people with specific skills that could be used to provide specific kinds of tutorials for students, not necessarily from their tutorial group.

Q5. So you see a lot of the responsibility rests with management and they need to actually.....

A. There needs to be a very clear ownership, at all levels, of the role of the tutor, that it needs to be managed for the benefit of the student and often I don't think it is.

SECTION E - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Q1. Can I ask you the insurance question now, is there anything else you'd like to comment on about personal tutorials?

A1. I think one of the problems that I would like to comment on is the fact that having been responsible for the development of a tutor development programme over the past couple of years, the fact that there's been such a difference in understanding of the roles of tutors between the various heads of schools, not just the tutors but the lead tutors as well, it's made it difficult for me to develop a tutor development programme which is accepted by the tutors themselves and because we operate a staff development process which is largely based on self selection, staff don't always recognise where their skill gaps are, where they need to develop a different attitude, so we don't always deliver a programme which is based on needs. We end up delivering it based on wants and sometimes the wants are poles apart from the needs.

Q. Would we need to go a step further back and actually help tutors, or potential tutors, to be aware of all the options and all the roles and responsibilities and all the sort of different ways of providing tutorial systems, and then they can actually see if they can fit into that probably?

A. Yes, it goes back to us starting from a new starting line, and saying right, we are now going to introduce a tutorial system. If you want to be a tutor you have to apply for the job fresh, and then interview them appropriately, have as part of the recruitment process the involvement of students in those recruitments, so there is a student dialogue there, and then begin to establish the mechanism for moving forward. Even for existing highly skilled tutors, I think they would be professional enough to take the opportunity for a reflective approach.

Thank you.

Glossary of definitions

(These are 'working definitions' for the purpose of this research)

EDUCATIONAL

Additional support

Help required by students who are low achieving, and/or who cannot easily grasp certain areas of learning

Adult Learners/Students

Students who are over 19 years of age

Adult returners

People who have been out of formal education for a considerable period of time following compulsory education

Assessment

A judgement as to whether all the known elements of a situation meet a given criteria

Basic Skills

The attainment of basic competency in literacy, numeracy and information technology (ILT)

Coaching

The preparation and training of a student by an academic member of staff, in order to undertake a specific task

Co-dependency

An overwhelming need to control, neglecting ourselves, and focusing on others (ie) the co-dependent person becomes a 'caretaker' (Beattie 1989:17)

Counselling

Listening to another person's problems, in an effort to help them to find solutions, usually utilising a body of psychological theory

Course Co-ordinator (aka Course Manager, Course Leader, Course Tutor)

A member of academic staff who organises or integrates diverse elements within a course of academic study, into a harmonious operation

Defence mechanisms

Psychological thought processes that protect someone from emotional pain (eg) denial, projection

Double bind

Feelings of impotence via the receipt of contradictory messages

Drop-out

Students who leave college before the completion of the course or programme for which they originally enrolled

Empathy

The power of understanding and imaginatively entering into another person's feelings

Empowerment

Possessing the knowledge and ability to make a decision on one's own behalf

Evaluating

Identifying or appraising the merit or value of something in a given context

Exchange

Expectation that one's actions with respect to others, will result in some kind of commensurate return (social exchange theory)

Learning and Skills Sector (Formerly Further Education)

The Learning and Skills Sector covers all full and part-time education and training for persons over compulsory school age (other than Higher Education). This includes independent providers (employers, trade unions, voluntary & community organisations), School 6th Forms, local education authority adult and community education services, tertiary colleges, and general further education colleges (GFEC's)

Further Education College Sector

This includes 6th Form Colleges, Specialist Colleges, Specialist Designated Colleges, Tertiary Colleges, General Further Education Colleges (GFEC's)

GFEC's

General Further Education Colleges

Gift relationship

A relationship based on the notion of exchange, mutual benefit, reciprocity

Help

To assist, aid, or alleviate a burden of someone by sharing the workload

Identity crisis

Lacking acknowledgement from self and others, lacking the feeling of historical continuity

Incorporation of colleges

Colleges becoming self-governing

Inclusive learning

Meeting a learner's needs, both personal and academic, as far as possible from existing provision

Individual learner support

The provision of one-to-one help for a student who is not making the required learning progress

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) The provision of information, the identification of options, and the recommendation of possible directions a student might take, in terms of academic and/or occupational progression

'In loco parentis'

Acting in the place of a parent or guardian, in the manner in which that parent would normally act

Lead Tutor

An experienced personal tutor, who co-ordinates and monitors the work of personal tutors and the tutorial system, within an academic department

Learning goals (outcomes/targets/aims) .

The obtaining of single qualifications, groups, modules or units of qualifications, increased knowledge, understanding and skills, occupational competence, milestones towards qualifications or employment, or securing employment, or a place in higher or further education, or personal growth and development

Learning Support Assistant (Worker)

Someone who assists students with the practical aspects of their studies

Lifelong learning

The acceptance that learning needs to be an ongoing process, in order to meet and deal with continuously changing life circumstances

Mentoring

A form of advice and guidance that is regarded as being wise and trustworthy

Monitoring

The continuous process of tracking, checking, controlling and recording a student's progress in meeting academic goals/targets

PAL/Study Buddy

A student who offers academic assistance to a student from the same learning group

Pastoral Care

The duty of a personal tutor, to oversee the general well-being of a student or group of students whilst undergoing a course of academic study. It is primarily concerned with the personal, as distinct from the academic development of students

Personal and learning skills

Include communication, presentation and team-work skills, independent study, research and analytical skills

Personal Tutor

Is an academic member of staff who assists students in meeting course requirements, by facilitating a process of students taking an increasing responsibility for their own learning, as well as the resolution of barriers to that process

Personal Tutoring

Is the establishment of a close two-way relationship, which can help to motivate students in achieving their learning outcomes, and if necessary, support them in overcoming any past or present barriers to learning, whether personal or academic

Proctor

A student or ex-student who offers academic help to a student at a lower level of learning

Rapport

A sympathetic/shared relationship or understanding

Relationship

The state of being connected or related, by the mutual dealings or feelings that exist between two people or groups of people

Rites of passage

Acknowledgement by ceremony or otherwise, that a person has undergone a change in status (eg) non-student to student, via interview and induction process

Role

Customary part played by a person in a particular social setting, sometimes uncharacteristic of the self

Role theory

- *role ambiguity* = no one knows what the role is
- *role incompatibility* = structured versus unstructured
- *role overload* = too many roles with which to cope
- *role conflict* = when different people in a role set (context) have differing perceptions of the role

Senior Tutor

An experienced personal tutor who acts as a 'champion' for tutors and tutoring systems within an educational organisation, and who promotes quality standards of practice in both group and individual tutorials

Self-concept

The total picture of one's self, consisting of self-image, self-esteem, and ideal self. The level of self esteem is measured by the distance between self-image and ideal self. The bigger the gap, the lower the self esteem

Social inclusion

The right for all individuals to be afforded the opportunity to participate fully, in all that society has to offer

Social Worker (Caseworker)

Someone who seeks to alleviate the condition of those experiencing disadvantage or loss. Someone who provides support and encouragement to help someone to achieve insight into their problems (past or present) and thereby bring about permanent positive life changes

Subject Tutor

A lecturer who teaches in a specific area of curriculum

Super Tutor/Dedicated Tutor

Someone who devotes all or most of their time solely to the tutoring function

Student development

The making of personal and/or academic progress

Student support

The giving of aid, courage and strength to a student, in order to develop learning, and overcome barriers to learning

Transference and counter-transference

Displacing or transferring of emotion from one person onto another person and vice versa

Tutorial

An in-depth, focused and supportive 'teaching and learning' method, either at a large group, small group, or individual level, the content of which is negotiable

Tutorial 'hard' skills

The ability to administrate, supervise, review etc.

Tutorial 'soft' skills

The ability to empathise, motivate, problem-solve etc.

Widening participation

The recruiting of disaffected learners and marginal groups back into education

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Blackpool and The Fylde College	(2002)	<i>The use of Learning mentors to improve retention and achievement in GCSE and Level 2 Vocational courses</i>
Brighton College of Technology	(1999)	<i>Strategic change in a straitjacket: a report on changes to tutorial support processes</i>
Crawley College	(2004)	<i>The Personal Adviser Initiative – improving retention of 16-19 learners</i>
Doncaster College	(2000)	<i>Raising quality and achievement through active personal tutorial support (16-19 year olds)</i>
Eastleigh College	(2004)	<i>Effective support processes for part-time learners</i>
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Knowsley Community College	(1999)	<i>Motivational Interviewing</i>
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North Birmingham College	(2002)	<i>Raising retention and achievement on the cross-college foundation programme</i>
North Hertfordshire College	(1999)	<i>Raising quality and achievement</i>
North Hertfordshire College	(2001)	<i>Introduction of a common cross-college tutorial framework for Curriculum 2000 students</i>

Northampton College	(2001)	<i>Improving retention and achievement on Level 3 Programmes Using a personal Tutor</i>
Norton Radstock College	(2004)	<i>Personalised Tutoring for better Learning</i>
Rotherham College of Arts and Technology	(2002)	<i>Re-focusing the tutorial curriculum and practice</i>
Salford College	(2000)	<i>Improving retention and achievement through a new system of tutorial support</i>
Sir John Deane's 6 th Form College	(2001)	<i>Peer support for As Level students (PAL's)</i>
South East Sussex College	(2002)	<i>Additional tutorial support (Adult Focus)</i>
Southampton City College	(2000)	<i>Introduction of a centralised tutorial system</i>
Sussex Downs 6 th Form College	(2002)	<i>Tutoring for achievement on the full time GCSE Programme</i>
Sutton Coldfield College	(1999)	<i>Improving implementation of the College's tutorial policy</i>
Tower Hamlets 6 th Form College	(2002)	<i>A student centred approach to improving retention and achievement at Level 2</i>
West Cheshire College	(1999)	<i>Identifying new approaches to on-programme student support</i>
Worcester 6 th Form College	(2002)	<i>Improving retention amongst full-time students through revisions to the pastoral system</i>
York College	(2002)	<i>An evaluation of strategies for supporting learners at risk of dropping out</i>

ANNEXE

UPDATE OF NATIONAL & LOCAL DEVELOPMENTS (2004 – 2006)

INTRODUCTION

Since the completion of my research operations in 2003, and during the period of analysing and writing my thesis (2004-2006), substantial changes have occurred both nationally in terms of government initiatives, and locally in terms of tutorial provision at the case-study college. What follows is a brief overview of these developments, along with the key points affecting teaching practice and the role of the personal tutor:

1. NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

(a) Government Legislation, Papers, Policy Statements

2004 – Children Act 2004

Provided a legal framework for *Every Child matters: change for children (2003)*, whereby key agencies are required to co-operate and plan services to improve the well-being, life chances and potential of children and young people, particularly those who are regarded as being socially disadvantaged. A further requirement, is to ensure that all staff are suitably trained, with a knowledge and understanding of children's needs, particularly with regard to pastoral welfare provision.

2004 – *Equipping teachers for the future: reforming initial teacher training for the learning and skills sector*

Follows on from 'Success for All (2002) and sets out the process to be effected in the professionalisation of teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning sector, through the development of new standards and qualifications to reflect teacher roles. The timetable for reform was identified with the new Initial Teacher Training courses which are scheduled to commence in September 2007. The term 'teacher' is to include the titles of lecturer, tutor (voluntary and community organisations), trainer (work-based learning), facilitator, and instructor. It does not include the title personal tutor'.

2005 – Foster Report – *Realising the potential: a review of the future role of further education colleges*

This report sought to bring clarity to the future role of further education colleges. Great emphasis was placed on the need to listen to consumers (learners and employers) when shaping future learning provision, particularly those who lack basic literacy and numeracy skills. In terms of college personnel, a need was recognised for improved leadership and management and a continuation of the progress already made in creating a qualified, professional front-line workforce. The implementation of the developments recommended in the report, are now being ‘driven forward’ as part of the work of the Learning and Skills Council.

Concern was noted in the report, regarding the strong influence of the government’s target-driving funding arrangements on college service provision, particularly with regard to retention and achievement of the ‘youth cohort’, which has focused activity away from the needs of adult learners.

2005 – Leitch Report – *Skills in the UK: The long term challenge*

Reviewed the future workforce skills required in order to maximise economic productivity, prosperity and thereby improve social justice. Within the report it was noted that over 60% of employers provided no training whatsoever for their employees.

2005 - White Paper - *14-19 Education and Skills*

Building on the findings of the Tomlinson Report 2003, this White paper seeks a radical reform, by establishing a culture of young people remaining in education until 19 years of age. This would be in order to not only achieve basic numeracy and literacy skills required to obtain employment, but also to acquire a set of personal values to enhance their quality of life.

This explored ways of increasing the effectiveness of the further education system in terms of up-skilling young people and adults in order to provide them with access to productive, rewarding and fulfilling employment. To this end, students would be offered ‘personalised’ education and training to meet their individual needs and circumstances. In addition, they would receive support to overcome barriers to such outcomes, along with better ‘pastoral’ support.

To facilitate this process, teachers would become ‘professionalised’ in terms of a re-structured initial teacher training programme based on a new set of professional standards. Upon qualification teachers would receive a ‘Licence to Practise’. This is to be accompanied by a requirement to enlist on a professional register thereby committing to a regular updating of practice via a programme of continuous professional development (CPD) and further specialist training as required. According to the Policy Statement of LLUK in March 2007, 27 CPD Optional Units have been submitted to SVUK for approval, none of which deal with training staff for the role of a personal tutor. A further 13 suggested themes have been received from stakeholders or Awarding Institutions, again, none of which concern the role of a personal tutor. Consequently, it would appear that as yet, no ‘formally approved’ training programme exists specifically for the role of a personal tutor in whatever context.

Teachers would also be aided in this process by the provision of standardised teaching resources, and the assistance of ‘subject learning coaches’ if required. These subject learning coaches would act as ‘critical friends’ and would help teachers to focus on how teaching practice could be improved/performed differently.

*2006 - College and School Record-keeping and OFSTED's Report on
Safeguarding Children (up to age 18)*

Implementation of government policy that all newly appointed staff in Further Education colleges must undergo a criminal records bureau check, a formal record of which, must be placed on the college staff records system. These records will be checked during any OFSTED inspection.

2006 – Developing qualifications for teachers, tutors and trainers in the Lifelong Learning Sector

Outlines the general content to be delivered at various levels in the new initial teacher training programme. Although the selection of mandatory units are complete, the full range of optional units at various levels has yet to be identified, following nominations from the Awarding Bodies.

2006 – New overarching professional standards for teachers, tutors and trainers in the Lifelong Learning Sector

These standards are intended as a framework for the creation of a new qualification for teachers within the Lifelong Learning Sector. The word 'teacher' subsumes all of those staff who perform the wide variety of teaching and training roles within the sector.

Some units of learning will be mandatory whilst others will be optional in order to allow for individual role specialisations. This document furthers the proposals contained in the DfES publication in 2004 'Equipping our teachers for the future: reforming initial teacher training for the Lifelong Learning Sector.

The evidence of care and support for students is now a requirement for inspection and will specifically address the following questions:

- Q1. How well are learners guided and supported?
- Q2. What is the effectiveness and extent of 'enrichment' provision?

Summary of new developments

All these national developments have in various ways served to re-inforce the central importance of the pastoral role in further education colleges and therefore carry some implications for the future performance of the personal tutor role.

(b) Government Departments and Agencies

Within recent years the New Labour Government has been actively re-organising the way in which further education is delivered. In order to facilitate this process, several new agencies have been created, whilst others have been reformed. These agencies are identified below along with a brief overview of their primary functions.

2004 - Lifelong Learning UK was formed. One of the key responsibilities of the agency is for the professional development of those staff working in further education. This task was formerly undertaken by the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO). The LLUK has delegated many of its tasks to its subsidiary organisation, Standards Verification UK (SVUK), which was also formed in 2004. The SSUK is responsible for establishing standards in the areas of:

- endorsing initial teacher training qualifications
- approve specialist qualifications for ESOL teachers, and literacy and numeracy in the Learning and Skills Sector
- to offer quality mark qualifications and CPD programmes

- monitor quality of training provision
- to offer a quality mark for teaching resource packages
- to promote new professional standards for teachers, tutors and trainers

This task of creating CPD programmes has been delegated to an already established independent body, The Institute for Learning (IfL), which is now the professional body for teachers, tutors and trainers in further education. Other new key responsibilities allocated to the IfL include:

- developing a Code of Professional Practice
- developing a Code of Ethics
- developing a Code of Environmental Practice
- consulting with members on how to influence key sector developments
- issuing 'licences to practise' to teachers
- Maintaining a record of CDP activities by members
- Conferring QTLS status to practitioners
- Maintaining a Register of QTLS practitioners

"It is intended that as part of the teaching qualifications development, optional units will be created which cover more specialist areas of teaching such as the personal tutor role". (Letter from SVUK Project Officer 12.10.06)

2006 - The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) was re-formed into two distinct agencies, namely the *Learning and Skills Network* (LSN) and the *Quality Improvement Agency for Lifelong Learning* (QIA).

The LSN has been charged with providing services to:

- policy-makers
- organisations that fund, manage and provide education
- individual providers and practitioners

This is to be effected by publications, reports, conferences and networks and research reports. It also intends to publish a practice-based journal.

The QIA has been established to champion and facilitate excellence and innovation in post-16 education and training services, and to build up the sectors capacity for self-improvement, via publications, conferences and the establishment of a 'Learning Exchange' to help practitioners to exchange 'best practice'.

(c) Research

Since my research operations were completed in 2003, there has been significant movement to place research high on the agenda in the FE sector. However, none of this activity is charged with addressing the role of the personal tutor in a general further education college, as noted below:

(i) Government and non-government organisations

All organisations that carry a mandate to either promote, undertake or commission research in the further education sector, whether government organisations and their subsidiaries or non-government organisations, were in early 2007 contacted regarding their past, current and future research interests concerning the role of the personal tutor in general further education:

- Department for Education and Skills (DfES)
- Learning and Skills Council (LSC)
- Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK)
- Standards Verification UK SVUK)
- Learning Skills Network (LSN)
- Quality Improvement Agency (QIA)

- Learning and Skills Research Centre (LSRC)
- Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN)
- Institute for Learning (IfL)
- National Institute for Adult and Further Education (NIACE)
- Further Education Research Association (FERA)
- National Foundation for Education Research (NFER)

It was confirmed that none of these organisations had in the past, conducted or commissioned, any research explicitly on the role of the personal tutor in general further education colleges. Neither at this point in time (March 2007), were any of the above organisations involved in such research, nor at this point in time, had they any plans to undertake or commission any future research in this area of further educational practice. However, some current/future pieces of research regarding the role of ‘teachers’ were identified, that may have some eventual implications for the role of the personal tutor:

Recent research interests in 2006

Institute for Learning has been commissioned by LLUK to research the following items in order to improve the ‘professionalism’ of ‘teachers’:

- Code Professional Practice
- Code of Ethics
- Code of Environmental Practice
- Model of Continuous Professional Development

Lifelong Learning UK

Monitoring initial teacher training

Individual skills updating in Further Education Colleges

Future research interests

The *Department for Education and Skills* has commissioned the LLUK through its subsidiary organisation SSUK, to undertake future research into:

- the role and responsibilities of ‘teachers’ (but not explicitly on the role of a personal tutor)
- record-keeping in colleges

Of note, is that the DfES has set up the Learning and Skills Research Centre (LSRC) which is managed by the LSN but is separate and distinct from LSN research activity, being conducted by external suppliers and partners from the research community. This is the first centre established by the DfES to focus solely on post-16 learning.

Also set up by DfES is the Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN). This is an independent body, but supported by the LSN. The main focus of its activity is the dissemination of research findings and the encouragement of research methods by policy-makers and practitioners.

(ii) Further Education Colleges

An attempt was made to conduct a further search of any LSDA (now LSN) sponsored research in general further education colleges during the period 2004-2006. However this was not possible, owing to the fact that reports of any research conducted by colleges during this period were misplaced/lost during the change-over from LSDA to LSC in 2006. This was confirmed in a telephone interview with LSC on 7th March 2007.

(d) Publications

(i) Literature

A further thorough and comprehensive search was made for any literature published during the period 2004-2006, regarding the role of a personal tutor.

Secondary Education

A book on tutoring by authors Bullock and Wikeley (2004) had *secondary schools* as its main context, with the focus being on 'learning theory and learning skills'.

Further Education

The Learning and Skills Network issued seven publications. These were focused on very specific aspects of *further education* tutoring namely:

- course planning
- curriculum design
- students with disabilities (2 publications)
- target-setting for A-Level students
- peer support on a key skills programme

Higher Education

A book by Thomas and Hixenbaugh (2006) had *Higher Education* as its context, and focused on case study examples of alternative styles of personal tutoring, including peer tutoring.

Consequently, none of the identified publications had any direct or explicit relevance for the focus of this thesis, namely, the role of the personal tutor in a general further education college.

It was noted by Bramley (1977) and Earwaker (1992) in chapter 2 of this thesis, that little published literature existed regarding the role of the personal tutor. It is interesting therefore, to note these assertions being reinforced as recently as 2006 by Thomas and Hixenbaugh who state:

A review of literature has confirmed that there is little published material explicitly about personal tutoring, and that much of what does exist is out of date and does not reflect the current UK context of increasing student numbers, worsening staff/student ratios, greater student diversity, competing demands on staff in relation to research, learning and teaching, student support and guidance and administrative responsibilities

(Thomas and Hixenbaugh, 2006:3)

(ii) Research Journals

A further thorough and comprehensive search of the relevant 22 education research journals cited in chapter 2 was conducted for the period 2004-2006. As journal articles often utilised vague titles, it was necessary to scrutinise individual articles in each journal. No articles were found on the role of a personal tutor, not least in a general further education college setting.

Altogether, a comprehensive and thorough search has been made of 862 individual articles in the 22 research journals named for the period 1993-2006, and nothing was found that explicitly addressed the role of a personal tutor in a general further education college. This is in addition to a search of the 391 LSDA sponsored research projects undertaken by colleges of general further education during the period 1997-2004.

2. LOCAL DEVELOPMENTS (At the Case Study College)

Many of the above-mentioned national developments have had significant impact on tutorial provision in General Further Education Colleges in the period 2004 - 2006, not least at the Case-Study College, as witnessed by the following extracts from a series of *Inspection Briefing Papers* prepared for a forthcoming inspection by the Adult Learning Inspection Team in January in 2007.

- Developed a hierarchy of tutorial management, which includes an Assistant Principal and three Heads of Tutoring. These are in addition to the existing posts of Senior Tutor, Lead Tutor and Personal Tutor. The responsibility of this hierarchy at various levels of authority are to:
 - develop the tutorial service provision within the college, with regard to both the 14-19 full-time students, and part-time students on substantial courses of 4-11 hours per week
 - implement the themes of 'Every Child Matters' within the tutorial programme
 - ensure a consistent delivery of the pastoral system in order to meet the requirements of OFSTED and other external agencies
 - participate in staff training programmes
 - support existing tutors
 - mentor new tutors
 - participate in tutorial processes (Progress Reviews and target – setting, attendance tracking systems etc)
 - participate in disseminating 'good practice'
 - develop tutorial resources
 - liaise with other members of the tutorial hierarchy and other internal and external supportive contacts(This hierarchy also provides a career structure for those staff wishing to specialise in Personal Tutoring)

- Established an accredited training programme (OCNSW at Level 3) for Personal Tutors. The programme is optional for existing tutors. This training programme for personal tutors was finally introduced in the academic year 2006-2007 following accreditation by the Open College network. It will however, to qualify for CPD Unit status, need to be approved by SVUK. The programme will consist of 12 x 2 hour sessions. However, not many of the earlier suggested topics have as yet been included within the currently proposed training module, the focus being mainly on the 'hard skills' such as administration, and managing the student's journey through the course, as opposed to the more 'soft skills' of relationship building, motivating and so forth.
- Developed a range of standardised administrative forms (37 in total) in order to facilitate the tutorial process (Progress Reviews, Target-setting, Individual Learning Plans, Tutorial Schemes of Work for all levels of learning including Enrichment Activities). These tutorial procedures are mandatory and must be followed by personal tutors.
- Created a Lead Tutor post for part-time students, but without a research role. The post carries a mandate to create a Lead Tutor Partnership for part-time students
- Developed other tutorial support strategies (e-tutoring, text-tutoring, central tutorial helpline)
- Introduced a Mentoring Scheme whereby individual senior members of management offer intensive motivational work with students, who have been identified and nominated by their personal tutors as under-achieving or failing in their studies.

- Introduced a Tutorial Validation Scheme whereby tutorial sessions are observed, and the views of tutors and students sought as to the quality of the tutorial support given, possibly leading to an action plan for improvement
- Established a 'Virtual Learning Environment' with standardised material to support tutorials
- Established a policy that all students (including those on part-time substantive courses of 4-11 hours) are entitled to receive formal tutorial time and the support of a personal tutor. Full-time students are to receive 2 hours per week (one hour for large group tutorials and one hour for individual (1-1) tutorials. Part-time students are to receive 30 minutes per group per week on a course of 4-6 hours and students on a 7-11 hours course are to receive 60 minutes per week.
- Established a mandatory standardised tutorial programme of Induction, Progress-reviewing/Target-setting, Enrichment, and Careers Progression. These are mandatory for all student groups, with the exception of Enrichment Activities which are optional for the part-time students.
- A new Tutorial Handbook (Policies and Procedures), was issued in January 2007, which includes the policy statement that:

“Progress reviews and target-setting are not optional and are to meet demands of OFSTED, ALI and LSC, who will make decisions on funding, based on the active incorporation of these activities in the college operations”

The *Inspection Briefing Papers* also noted several weaknesses that still need addressing:

- Tutorial support and entitlement (including Enrichment Activities) is still not consistent across all Academies, with some students not participating
- No up-to-date tutorial resources exist for part-time students
- Improvement of the identification of vulnerable adult students and the type of help they require