

# INKC Personal Tutoring Literature Review – Summary

## The impact of personal tutoring for students

### *Student experiences of personal tutoring and links to academic outcomes*

Research has found:

- Improvements to students' learning and progression by fostering a **good relationship** between the tutor and tutee<sup>1</sup>.
- **Consistent communication** with tutors can “lead to better student retention, increased academic performance, and improved learning”<sup>2</sup>
- **Responsible and supportive personal tutors** can enhance the student experience and in turn help improve retention, progression, and ultimately completion, by enabling students to connect different elements of learning and **facilitating academic integration**.<sup>3</sup>
- Graduates who had a **caring, engaging, and encouraging professor** were twice as likely to be engaged at work and thriving in their well-being postgraduation<sup>2</sup>

### *Importance of personal tutoring for non-traditional and marginalised students*

- Personal tutoring is important for all students but can be **particularly valuable for non-traditional students** with limited expectations and experience of higher education. Kreig found that “those students with previous academic experience and a family background in higher education have more realistic expectations, which contribute towards their successful adjustment and integration into university life”.<sup>4</sup>
- “Increased widening participation brings **heightened complexity and challenges**” and that more students are attending university as **first-generation applicants** “who juggle conflicting priorities and have limited or inaccurate true knowledge of the reality of HE experiences”<sup>5</sup>

- The literature suggests that **personal tutors can support students** in managing expectations and provide guidance to students who are more likely to struggle in the transition - for example, first-in-family students.
- Some early research suggests “there is a **potential of pastoral tutoring narrowing the BAME attainment gap**”, with a focus on sense of belonging facilitated by personal tutoring affecting attainment.<sup>12</sup>
- One article suggests that BAME students may feel a greater sense of belonging if their personal tutor is also from a BAME background and can relate to their experiences, and that “it is important for a **personal tutor to be able to understand and empathise** to a degree with a student’s position and conditions”. There is a lack of diversity in the academy, making it less likely all BAME students could be allocated a BAME personal tutor, so Alves argues that staff of all ethnicities should educate themselves on different life experiences and create an environment where **BAME students feel more comfortable** to approach a tutor.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Risks of ineffective or poor-quality personal tutoring for student success***

- “**Poor personal tutoring is worse than not providing a PT at all**, as this can lead to students experiencing strong negative emotions of anger, internalised attributions and a move towards re-evaluating their decision to go to university”<sup>6</sup>
- Mynott reinforces that “there are **organisational risks** if there is a perception of PT not working or being effective”<sup>7</sup>, suggesting that student complaints and appeals can impact both NSS scores and the capacity of universities who then have to handle these complaints.

### ***Effectiveness of pastoral and academic support from personal tutors***

- The literature suggests that personal tutoring has the **greatest impact on student satisfaction** when it combines pastoral and academic support.
- Research tends to support a **holistic conception of personal tutoring**, as “regular academic and social advice and support is what the majority of students believe personal tutoring should provide”<sup>8,9</sup>

- In one study, **41%** of student respondents stated that academic support was the most valued aspect of personal tutoring. In the same study, **24%** also mentioned they would see their tutor for personal issues.<sup>10</sup>
- In another study, **almost all** of the students surveyed viewed pastoral support as the primary purpose of personal tutoring. The **expectations of first-year students** aligned with this, as they expected personal tutors to help “students to navigate the systems and other support services offered by the institution”.<sup>11</sup>
- **Feeling cared for** by their tutor is crucial to students’ experience: “What permeates across all student experiences in this study is that evidence of a genuine desire to help is essential to the success of the PT [personal tutor]–student relationship and that this has implications for the institution as a whole, in terms of measurable student outcomes.”<sup>6</sup>
- The **tutor-tutee relationship is key**. When personal tutoring was incorporated into a first-year academic skills module in one study, they found this curriculum-integrated method linked to “an increase in attendance, retention and achievement levels” as the **meaningful relationships** between student and tutor enabled early interventions and personalised support.<sup>5</sup>

## References

1. Braine and Parnell, 2011
2. Leach and Wang, 2015 (from Grey and Osborne, 2018)
3. Grey and Osborne, 2018
4. Kreig, 2013
5. Brown and Brymer, 2020
6. Yale, 2017
7. Mynott 2016
8. Stephen et al, 2008
9. Hixenbaugh et al, 2006
10. Raby, 2020
11. Dixon, 2019
12. Alves, 2019

*Full bibliography details available on request*