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PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES OF PERSONAL TUTORING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

This literature review offers an introductory investigation into the various perspectives and practices of personal tutoring in higher education. Whilst most universities have some form of personal tutoring programme, it is not always clear how far institutions are embedding their practices in evidence-based research and whether personal tutoring is being appropriately implemented and valued. The literature review outlines multiple authors perspectives on personal tutoring, drawn from research conducted with both personal tutors and student tutees. The research analysed for this work draws on policy, practice and feelings about personal tutoring, and the range of insights are recorded to demonstrate different opinions and findings on particular perspectives and practices of personal tutoring. It is hoped this literature review will inform colleagues about existing research and consider how our practices align with what the literature is showing us to be effective practices for tutors and tutees.

Personal tutoring roles & models of practice

Personal tutoring programmes are a common staple of provision in UK higher education institutions, with most universities providing a version of personal tutoring for their students (Grant, 2006). Whilst various government policies and papers guide personal tutoring from a distance (Mynott, 2016), institutions decide on their organisational policies individually, which leads to different perceptions and practices of personal tutoring between institutions. These different policies mean there is no singular definition of the role of the personal tutor; however, Thomas outlines the key responsibilities of a personal tutor which goes some way to offer a definition:

> "[Personal tutors are] academic staff who provide holistic guidance on an academic and personal level including information about higher education processes, procedures and expectations, academic feedback and development; personal welfare support, referral to further information and support; a relationship with the institution and a sense of belonging." (2006: 21).

This list of areas of work for personal tutors highlights the range of responsibilities held by these staff members, often in addition to their usual duties as academic staff. Some universities use terms like "pastoral tutor, academic tutor, learning support, mentor and guide" (Atkinson, 2014) rather than personal tutor, but for the purposes of this literature review the most common term of personal tutor will be used throughout. As the general responsibilities of personal tutors can be broad, there are multiple well-established models of personal tutoring structures which highlight the diverse ways personal tutoring can be conceptualised and put into practice. Grey and Osborne outline these models in their article investigating best practices of personal tutoring, taking insights from Earwaker (1992) to introduce these models as "the *Pastoral* model in which the tutor offers support on academic and personal matters; the *Professional* model which focuses on trained staff who undertake academic advising as their sole role; and the *Curriculum Integrated* model which embeds structured group

tutoring sessions into the formal curriculum" (Grey and Osborne, 2018: 288). Each model will be discussed in turn, drawing definitions and perceptions of each model from the literature studied.

Pastoral model of personal tutoring

For universities using the pastoral model, "a specific member of staff is assigned to each student to provide personal and academic support" (McFarlane, 2016: 78). This is a common model and generally one that incoming students expect. Dixon *et al* surveyed students at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) about personal tutoring and found the vast majority of the first-year cohort surveyed had "both an expectation of one-to-one personal contact with a tutor, as well as a clearly identified need." Notably, the respondents "envisioned the tutor as offering a pastoral role, with an emphasis on help, feedback, support and guidance as they settled into their new life as undergraduate students" (2019: 20). The emphasis on pastoral support, which "comprises the range of support and services that are provided for students' emotional, psychological and spiritual wellbeing" (Equality Challenge Unit, 2014a), can be seen both in students' perceptions and in policies implemented by and for staff. Dixon highlights the key roles of the personal tutor as outlined in LJMU's personal tutoring policy as encompassing "Academic Guidance and Monitoring of Student Engagement", "Professional Development and Referral", and "Pastoral and Personal Development and Referral". Personal tutors are expected to "offer pastoral oversight with referral and signposting to specialist student support and advice services" under this final key responsibility (Dixon *et al*, 2019: 19).

In this model, "academic staff are expected to act as personal tutors to a number of students" (Luck, 2010), from the beginning to the end of the student's degree. Multiple authors highlight the importance of the personal tutor being someone who also teaches the student, as Grey and Osborne suggest that "students prefer to know their tutor before using them for support", so "it is suggested that the student should be allocated a tutor based in their own subject (Thomas 2012) who also teaches them (Sosabowski et al. 2003), ideally in the first year (Foster et al. 2012)." (Grey and Osborne, 2018: 287). In particular, Thomas sees the pairing of tutor and tutee as "an important strategy to nurture belonging through relationships with staff" and recommends the allocation of a tutor who teaches their tutee in some capacity to foster stronger personal relationships (Thomas, 2012: 42).

Professional model of personal tutoring

Whilst the pastoral model expects academic staff to take on the role of tutor alongside their usual role, the professional model of personal tutoring "focuses more on trained staff who undertake this role on a full-time basis" (McFarlane, 2016: 78). This model has dedicated staff for personal tutoring, rather than adding this role to a lecturer's existing job description. The professional model does not appear to be common across the literature studied thus far, but the Cardiff School of Management is one case study of a "dedicated Personal Tutoring Unit (PTU)" which "consists of the equivalent of less than 3 full-time staff" and "has held over 1,500 one-to-one meetings with students" (Levy *et al*, 2009: 36). Levy *et al* note that their PTU was created out of feedback from staff and students about concerns about staff availability and the level of support they could provide students who needed extra support. Staff at Cardiff were initially concerned "over whether students would engage with tutors who were not necessarily involved in their teaching" (ibid), which is a notable shift from the pastoral model where it is encouraged for tutors to be involved in the student's teaching. The PTU at Cardiff appointed two members of staff to "start the unit and to begin a form of personal tutoring that could be delivered in

one place by dedicated staff" and has since expanded with further part-time staff to build "a team of tutors with diverse skills, including a qualified special needs teacher specialising in dyslexia, dyspraxia and other learning difficulties" (ibid: 37). In this model there is no set structure to meetings or a mandatory number of meetings and students can choose when to access the PTU.

Curriculum-integrated model of personal tutoring

The curriculum integrated model of personal tutoring "embeds structured group tutoring sessions into the formal curriculum" (Grey and Osborne, 2018: 288) and "the personal tutoring is timetabled and there is, therefore, a requirement for staff and students to attend" (McFarlane, 2016: 78). This model often uses group tutorials delivered within students' usual timetable "integrated into study skills modules, and introduce students to learning at university, discussing expectations, facilitating understanding of their own learning processes, identifying sources of expert help and advice, and encouraging peer support" (Grey and Osborne, 2018: 288). Grey and Osborne suggest that "this approach is particularly advocated for students in their first year, when there are expectations of a more prescriptive style of interaction" (ibid), which appears to be corroborated by findings from Dixon *et al's* study that "Level 4 students appeared to be drawn towards the curriculum model of personal tutoring, wherein contact is timetabled and routinised" (Dixon *et al*, 2019: 21). For example, Wakelin notes that the Nottingham Law School at Nottingham Trent University takes a curriculum approach where "the personal and academic tutor (PAAT) module forms the basis of personal tutoring", which features "two lectures each academic year with the PAAT module leader" and one-to-one meetings with an individual personal tutor too (2021: 4). Whilst the curriculum integrated model doesn't always facilitate one-to-one contact with a tutor, it does maintain structured meetings and consistent interaction with the tutor, and peers, through regular timetabled sessions.

Hybrid models of personal tutoring

Most of the literature named the above models as the primary modes of tutoring in universities, but there is a sense that these models can be adapted and indeed Grey and Osborne highlight that "tutoring models should be flexible enough to satisfy the different requirements of the student body" (2018: 288). McFarlane notes that a combination of the named models can be preferred:

> "At some universities, a hybrid of the three models exists; each student has a nominated personal tutor; there are guidance advisers for each area of the discipline providing professional support, student services dealing with specific issues and, in some cases, tutoring integrated into the curriculum." (McFarlane, 2016: 78)

The various models of personal tutoring can be implemented independently or used to create a bespoke hybrid model to suit the needs of the institution, its staff and its student cohort. This flexibility may extend to offering different approaches to different stages of student. As noted above, Dixon *et al* found that level 4 (stage one/first year) students preferred a curriculum integrated model; they also noted that level 5 (stage two/second year) "respondents felt that [personal tutoring meetings] should be instigated by the students themselves, rather than integrated into their scheduled classes" (2019: 21). This shift in preference between the stages suggests a preference for the pastoral model as students' progress and adjust more to student life and the expectations of university; therefore, it may benefit universities to consider which personal tutoring models are most effective for students at each stage of their degree and adapt a more flexible approach across cohorts.

The role of the personal tutor: from policy to practice

Policymakers in the government and in institutions influence academic practices of personal tutoring; Mynott argues that these policies don't always reflect the reality of enacting personal tutoring practices, speaking from her experience as a personal tutor as "policy implementation can be difficult, messy and inconsistent" (2016: 106). Whilst there are policies in place at the national and local level (e.g. Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2015; UKAT, 2019; Newcastle University, 2021; Liverpool John Moores University, 2020), there are concerns raised by Mynott and other authors (Luck, 2010; Grey and Osborne, 2018; McFarlane, 2016) that these are not always translated into practice and personal tutors feel ill prepared to conduct their role in reality. This is concerning as personal tutors are often regarded to be an "anchor on which the support system of the university rests" (Mynott, 2016: 106) and "expected to act as a conduit between the student, the curriculum and pastoral support available" (McFarlane, 2016: 78). This important role as a 'conduit' or 'anchor' is represented as key to student success in much of the literature studied, but if tutors feel that their role is unmanageable or ill-defined, questions arise about how effectively they will be able to fulfil this role as gatekeeper to university services for many students.

The core purpose of personal tutoring is argued, by Mynott, to be to fulfil student need and vulnerability. Mynott argues that students are viewed as vulnerable and thus in need of models of support which "follow a pastoral tradition" (2016: 107):

> "The question that needs asking at this point is, what vulnerability means in this context? Is the student vulnerable to failing modules, or leaving university or of the student not achieving to their fullest potential? These questions can be linked to policy issues such as retention, learning gain and achievement in terms of class of degree or award" (ibid).

Here, vulnerability is linked to key sector-wide issues of retention, attainment and student success. Mynott makes the case for pastoral support being integral to the personal tutoring role, as it is needed to support students through the vulnerable experience of transitioning to university and appears to reject the notion that academic and personal matters can be separated to reduce personal tutoring to purely academic guidance. This will be explored in detail later, as there are various views from students and tutors on what personal tutoring means to them and how the role can impact their experience.

Yale suggests that many universities don't fully consider evidence or meaningful evaluation of personal tutoring when implementing personal tutoring programmes and that their "practices rely more on the beliefs of the decision-making individuals in the department and the economics of the institution than on solid empirical foundations" (2017: 535). This critique needs to be considered and challenged through thorough engagement with research-based evidence of best practice and a willingness to adapt practices to serve both staff and students more effectively. Therefore, the following sections of the literature review will focus on both examining reported barriers to successful and engaging personal tutoring for staff and students and highlighting the significant impact high- or low-quality personal tutoring can have on students throughout their university experience.

The impact of personal tutoring for students

There is an array of studies which have found links between personal tutoring and academic outcomes, demonstrating the impact personal tutoring could have on aspects of a student's life. These impacts include improving student success and satisfaction through advising seminars (Battin, 2014) and improving students' learning and progression by fostering a good relationship between the tutor and tutee (Braine and Parnell, 2011). Consistent communication with tutors can "lead to better student retention, increased academic performance, and improved learning (Leach and Wang, 2015)" (Grey and Osborne, 2018: 288). Grey and Osborne highlight the impact tutors can have on key institutional measures like retention and completion by citing multiple studies:

> "Responsible and supportive personal tutors can enhance the student experience and in turn help improve retention (Webb, Wyness, and Cotton 2017), progression, and ultimately completion (Smith 2008), by enabling students to connect different elements of learning (Stevenson 2009) and facilitating academic integration (Leach and Wang 2015)" (Grey and Osborne, 2018: 286).

Importantly, Grey and Osborne outline how personal tutoring can continue to impact students beyond university, as "good personal tutoring can facilitate personal and professional development in students (Smith 2008)" (Grey and Osborne, 2018: 286) and there are particularly important findings from Leach and Wang, that "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" (2015: 325). With the personal tutor being asked to take this role of an encouraging staff member with a personal connection to the student, it is clear that the success of this relationship can have real impact on student experience, retention and employment success after university.

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" (2013: 534), whilst Luck argues that the rise of the 'widening participation agenda' has contributed to an increase in students from under-represented backgrounds where there is a "greater cultural disjunction between student and institutional expectations and norms" (2010: 276). This is echoed by Brown and Brymer who similarly argue that "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" (2020: 46). These issues being raised alongside the principle that tutors should help bridge the gaps between student and institution, 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.

The importance of effective personal tutoring, and the dangers of ineffective or poor-quality personal tutoring, is made clear by Yale:

> "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" (2017: 542).

Multiple authors note the potential for students to feel like their tutor doesn't care about them and express their frustration and upset in negative responses on the National Student Survey (NSS) and other surveys, which may have implications for the institution through these measures of student satisfaction (Yale, 2017; Bates and Kaye, 2014). Mynott reinforces that "there are organisational risks if there is a perception of PT not working or being effective" (2016: 108), suggesting that student complaints and appeals can impact both NSS scores and the capacity of universities who then have to handle these complaints. The literature is clear that institutions need to work to ensure their personal tutoring system is robust and effective, or risk affecting students' experience and satisfaction, with the potential to cause damage to the university's reputation and workload too. For students to experience the positive effects of personal tutoring, outlined above, they need to feel heard and able to engage in the process; otherwise, not only will these positive effects be absent, but there is also the potential for negative effects and students questioning "the actual value of the degree" (Yale, 2017: 542).

Personal tutoring appears to have the greatest impact on student satisfaction when it combines pastoral and academic support, according to the literature studied thus far. Stephen *et al* highlight that 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" (Stephen *et al*, 2008: 450; Hixenbaugh et al, 2006). There are different perspectives on how students value academic and personal/pastoral support in their personal tutoring relationships. For example, in Raby's research focused on student voices within personal tutoring at the University of Lincoln, academic support is more popular as "the main reason students reported seeing their personal tutor was for academic support, although 24% mentioned that they would see their tutor for personal issues" and "41% of the students stated that academic support was the most valued aspect of personal tutoring" (2020: 5).

However, almost all of the students surveyed in Dixon's study viewed pastoral support as the primary purpose of personal tutoring, viewing personal tutors as providing a "listening ear and someone to watch out for you" and acting "as a support system" (Dixon *et al*, 2019: 20). Importantly, the first-year cohort in Dixon's research expected personal tutors to provide both pastoral and academic support: "That personal tutors should also offer academic support was also discussed, but this was clearly seen to be secondary – helping students to navigate the systems and other support services offered by the institution was clearly paramount" (ibid). These understandings of personal tutoring encompassing academic and more personal issues are further emphasised by students' wishes for staff to recognise how personal challenges affect academic success, as demonstrated in a student quotation excerpt:

> "... a lot of your personal things do actually affect the way you perform academically and I think you need to deal with both rather than just sort of, saying 'Ok, we will deal with the academic' because all your strains are outside of your academic life, they all influence how you do academically." (Stephen *et al*, 2008: 453).

This suggests that students place significant value on personal tutors who understand how personal and academic issues overlap and want to see personal tutors as their contact for any problems they're facing, whether directly or indirectly linked to academic performance. Students in Stephen *et al*'s study had the most positive experiences of personal tutoring when tutors provided a mixture of personal and academic support, and were broadly against models which separate academic and pastoral support entirely, as they felt these aspects interact and cannot be dealt with in isolation (ibid). Whilst "most students agreed that they would like their personal tutors to adopt a more proactive role in monitoring

their academic progress" (ibid), suggesting a desire for tutors to support academic success, the most significant impacts on students were noted by various authors to relate to the caring, pastoral side of the role. Whilst Raby's findings suggest some students highly value academic support, the range of findings about the value of pastoral support too highlights the importance of facilitating a personal tutoring system that can meet both academic and personal needs, as individual students have individual needs. As Yale concludes, 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. Feeling genuinely cared for can provide the strong foundation to help buffer against more challenging times (Brinkworth *et al*, 2009) and add to the overall value that students place on their degree." (Yale, 2017: 542).

Similarly, drawing on the importance of a good tutor-tutee relationship, Brown and Brymer argue that the depth of this relationship is key to a successful personal tutoring programme. Their research compared two models of personal tutoring at university business schools, one following a curriculum-integrated model and another implementing coaching from trained staff. The curriculum-integrated model incorporated tutoring into a first-year academic skills module led by tutors to "increase rich contact time with tutees" and enhance "opportunity for student-led dialogue between student and tutor" (Brown and Brymer, 2020: 54). This method of personal tutoring was found to link to "an increase in attendance, retention and achievement levels" as the meaningful relationships between student and tutor enabled early interventions and personalised support, as trust and knowledge of individual circumstances was developed through the module (ibid). They concluded that "rich dialogue for disclosure of issues and personal circumstances of students is key to effective on-boarding and providing the right support for the first year of study to students with fragmented identities, as they progress through a period of challenge and transformation" (ibid: 56). This suggests that fostering a close relationship between student and tutor can impact student's first-year experience and the associated academic outcomes that come with a more positive transition, such as improved continuation rates and attainment.

Personal tutoring has been found to impact on many students of different backgrounds and experiences, and literature supports a universal model that provides all students with a personal tutoring experience as authors believe that "personal tutor support is needed even for those with a straightforward passage through their university life" (Grey and Osborne, 2018: 286). However, it is important to consider how particular under-represented student groups may find unique benefits or challenges relating to personal tutoring and consider how personal tutoring programmes can be designed to be fair and useful for all types of students. There is some limited research available discussing potential links between personal tutoring and attainment for Black, Asian and minority ethnic students (commonly abbreviated to BAME). Alves' article discusses the relationships between personal tutoring and academic performance of BAME students, arguing that "there is a potential of pastoral tutoring narrowing the BAME attainment gap" (2019: 66). He links attainment to sense of belonging and suggests that "a students' sense of belonging and mattering at university can affect attainment, and personal tutoring has the potential to improve this" (ibid: 74); this connects to other research highlighting the links between belonging and academic outcomes (Walton and Cohen, 2011; Thomas, 2012; Yeager *et al*, 2016).

Alves 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" (2020: 68). There is a lack of diversity in the academy (Equality Challenge Unit, 2014b; Arday & Mirza, 2018; Arday, 2020), 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. Importantly, Alves does not offer empirical evidence to link personal tutoring with reducing the BAME attainment gap, so we cannot take his argument to be based in research at this time. However, it was felt important to include these arguments as we can begin to connect hypotheses raised in other studies that potentially connect sense of belonging, strong pastoral support, and attainment and student success, whilst considering this as an area of potential exploration in future literature reviews or research.

There are various impacts on students based on their interactions with personal tutors and the quality of the relationships formed and the support on offer. The literature offers a range of approaches and potential outcomes, whilst also warning of the risks of poor-quality tutoring on student's experiences and academic outcomes. It is clear from the literature that effective personal tutoring can have significant positive associations with improved retention, academic performance and student satisfaction. However, all the articles analysed for this review also emphasised that there are multiple barriers facing both tutors and students in the desire to provide high-quality personal tutoring. The following sections will discuss some of these barriers and, where gleaned from the literature, suggestions for improvements to work towards more sustainable and efficient practices of personal tutoring.

Barriers to effective personal tutoring: for staff

There are a multitude of barriers to effective personal tutoring which have immediate impact on staff, which is transferred to the student and the overall success of the tutor-tutee relationship. Multiple studies analysed for the literature review focused primarily on the experiences of the personal tutor (McFarlane, 2016; Grey and Osborne, 2018; Mynott, 2016; Luck, 2010) with some key similarities between their findings and conclusions that highlight ingrained problems with the practices of personal tutoring programmes across UK higher education institutions. With some authors labelling personal tutoring programmes as being 'in crisis' (Evans, 2009) since the noughties, there are arguments that this crisis is due to "poor staff–student ratios arising from increased student numbers, academic staff prioritising research, a wider diversity of students, competing demands on resources, and changing student expectations (including value for money and staff contact time)" (Grey and Osborne, 2018: 287). Some of these issues will be explored within this section with consideration to how they impact both the tutors and their tutees.

Role clarity

McFarlane interviewed eight personal tutors from Staffordshire University for her research investigating personal tutors' experiences and how factors such as "training, role clarity, workload and emotional responses" can affect their perceived confidence and competence in their roles (2016: 78). It would be expected that staff need to understand their role as a personal tutor to be able to conduct the

responsibilities effectively and provide students with appropriate support. However, McFarlane found that “six of the eight tutors interviewed felt that the personal tutor’s role lacked clarity” and described this as “role confusion” (2016: 82). This lack of clarity is not new, as Gidman’s research in 2001 about the role of the personal tutor highlighted that “there was a lack of clear guidance for lecturers adopting the personal tutor role” (363). If this lack of guidance has indeed persisted for 20 years, it is unsurprising that there is evidence of “conflicting ideologies as to the nature of personal tutoring” (Watts, 2011, in McFarlane, 2016: 78) and, amongst pressures of scrutiny to prove the value of tutoring, “a lack of clarity at the start as to what its role actually is” (Mynott, 2016: 110).

McFarlane’s participants linked the lack of role clarity to institution-specific boundaries between different support roles (2016: 83), which relates to earlier findings of disparate policies and perceptions of personal tutoring across, and within, higher education institutions. This lack of clarity impacts students too, who often have their own confusions as to the role of the tutor; as Yale reports, student participants in her study “felt that they used a mixture of previous experiences, guesswork, and trial and error to work out what their PT was for” (2017: 539) and there was confusion over the purpose of tutor meetings, leading to some students viewing them as a waste of time. The lack of role clarity could be impacted by the lack of a comprehensive national standard for the personal tutoring role, as frameworks offered by organisations like the United Kingdom Advising and Tutoring association (UKAT) are only guidance and may not be relatable for all personal tutoring models across diverse universities.

Training

Multiple authors emphasise the importance of training and attribute poorer quality personal tutoring to a lack of training. McFarlane references the work of Owen (2002) where “lack of training of tutors was a key deficiency raised” (2016: 85), which was manifested in her study as tutors sought “continuous updating and development” even after receiving initial training when they began the role (ibid). It appears from the literature that most personal tutors receive some level of training; in Luck’s research, they note that “academics receive staff development to support them and a time allowance of 1 hour per year per tutee” (2010: 275). However, there is no specificity to what staff development entails, and the time allocation for training is very low, highlighting the common thread that “personal tutors lack training, support, formal supervision, or the time to undertake training that may be relevant” (Grey and Osborne, 2018: 289). There are themes within multiple articles about expectations for academics to take on the personal tutoring role without any training, with other literature revealing assumptions that it will ‘come naturally’ for lecturers upon accepting the role (Owen, 2002; Gubby and McNab, 2013). Direct quotations from McFarlane’s interviews with personal tutors consolidate these assumptions, as one tutor noted that they “had to figure it out myself as I’ve gone along, I haven’t particularly had any guidance”, supported by four tutors in the study identifying ‘gaps in the support and guidance’ for tutoring as “a lack of discussions about tutorials and the absence of training and initial guidance” (McFarlane, 2016: 83). Whilst the research studied for this review may not necessarily reflect training practices at all institutions, there is an emerging trend of a lack of training and a clear desire from tutors to be given more training opportunities.

In terms of opportunities for training, multiple studies highlight potential areas for universities to focus on when training personal tutors. Race’s work found that many tutors learn through experience and talking to colleagues (Race, 2010: 21); interviews with personal tutors from McFarlane’s research echo this as tutors referenced “‘getting together’, ‘comparing’, ‘peer observations’ and ‘a refresher course’”

as their preferred methods for future training (2016: 85). Training was mentioned by most tutors in McFarlane's study when asked for suggestions to improve support for tutors, with ideas such as "guidelines, specific mentoring and peer observations" highlighted by current tutors (ibid: 84). Alongside the desire for a baseline of guidelines, the need for training to support handling of sensitive topics from students also emerged in the literature as an important addition to the personal tutoring training regime (McFarlane, 2016; Wakelin, 2021). For example, "Watts (2011) highlighted tutors' lack of supervision, support and training when dealing with intense personal issues and the importance of boundary setting. Owen's (2002) research suggested training for tutors might include counselling skills and referral and that an alternative might be a tutors' manual" (McFarlane, 2016: 85). The difficulties for tutors in handling personal issues will be expanded on in a later section, but there are links between training and the tutor's capacity to support distressed students which should be made explicit.

One method of enhanced training and support, which could resolve the issues raised by these authors in terms of tutors feeling prepared to support all tutees and their personal problems, is professional supervision. Drawing from clinical supervision, commonly used in counselling professions, this could "provide a development, restorative and ethical underpinning for personal tutoring" (ibid; Hawkins and Shohet, 2012). However, the literature tends to only raise this as one suggestion, with the acknowledgement that other methods, such as greater support from senior tutors (Luck, 2010) or continuous development, could also provide the enhanced levels of training that tutors are asking for.

Workload

Unsustainable high workloads can be identified as a significant barrier to effective delivery of personal tutoring. Across the literature, the impact of academic's intense workloads and lack of time to engage in personal tutoring is highlighted as an issue. The pressure on academics to balance teaching, research, administrative tasks and tutoring is highlighted by Luck, McFarlane, Wakelin, and Grey and Osborne in detail. Whilst Luck's focus is on academics in the biosciences, the reflection that "prioritising these conflicting demands can be impossible" feels universal regardless of discipline (2010: 278), particularly as Watts concurs that "intense workloads can 'render robust personal tutor support particularly challenging, even burdensome'" (2011: 216). The broader issue of academic workload can't be covered sufficiently in this scope, but the high expectations on academics to 'do it all' is relevant here as it can directly impact on student satisfaction and the quality of the personal tutoring they receive. Grey and Osborne highlight this:

> "A positive correlation exists between students who interact frequently with their personal tutor and their overall satisfaction levels (Hester, 2010) and continuation (McFarlane, 2016). Conversely, a lack of contact between students and personal tutors has a negative effect (Ghenghesh, 2017) and therefore regular contact is deemed as good practice" (Grey and Osborne, 2018: 289).

Whilst they highlight regular contact as a method for retaining relationships between tutor and tutee, other authors suggest that good practices can go beyond the expectations of university policy. Mynott notes that students who don't engage in tutoring are often the ones who need the most support, and therefore more attention and action from the tutor. She highlights how much of the administrative burden of personal tutoring is not factored into policy workload allocation, as one tutor comments that "follow up phone calls, emails and re-arranged meetings all take time and effort and a lot of PT work happens outside of the timetabled meetings mentioned in the PT policy" (2016: 109). This is supported

by McFarlane, who found that a "potential hindrance to personal tutors' confidence is the lack of time allowed for the role, and more broadly, the impact of feeling overwhelmed with work" (2016: 79). This time scarcity for academic staff likely contributes to some tutors feeling either guilty for their "inability to deal with the numbers of students" or viewing personal tutoring as an unwanted "occupational hazard" (ibid: 84). This sense of personal tutoring feeling like a burden taking time away from research is reflected in other work, as Grey and Osborne note that "many academics feel that meetings should not be mandatory, which can largely be attributed to the fact that they are busy and prefer to have time to undertake their other work (Ghenghesh, 2017)" (Grey and Osborne, 2018: 289).

The lack of time to commit to personal tutoring practices, and some evidence of lack of desire to engage from tutors, contributes to conflicting views on how personal tutoring contact should work. Generally, students felt their tutor should initiate contact, whilst "many tutors believe that students should initiate contact with them" (ibid), suggesting a lack of clarity on good practices of tutor-tutee contact and perhaps a desire from the tutors to minimise their tutoring workload as much as possible by assigning the tutee with more responsibility to reach out. The literature suggests this can be problematic, as it is often students least likely to ask for help who are actually in most need of it (Mynott, 2016). This is compounded by tutors being allocated high numbers of tutees, as in McFarlane's study, "four of the tutors felt that the numbers of tutees and their workload within their roles affected negatively on their ability to fulfil their role as a tutor and form relationships with their tutees" (2016: 83). The tutors interviewed reported feeling that they're given too many students to form meaningful connections and maintain regular contact with, an issue which is difficult to remedy without rethinking how tutor-tutee pairings can be made with more realistic expectations for the time needed to form relationships with each student.

Overall, the literature reveals that "high workloads impact negatively on personal tutoring", with McFarlane drawing on evidence from Barlow and Antoniou (2007), Myers (2008), Owen (2002) and Watts (2011) to consolidate her findings. Importantly, McFarlane noted that "a feeling of 'guilt' was not confined to new tutors, with more experienced tutors also expressing this emotion" (2016: 86), suggesting that the high workload and time scarcity is common regardless of academic position or experience. This then suggests that many students are expected to build relationships with a personal tutor who is likely to be time-poor, stressed and less able to invest time in meaningful relationship-building and support.

Emotional responses and boundaries

Alongside the administrative burden which is recognised as contributing to a lack of time for personal tutoring, tutors also face the emotional burden of being the first point of contact for students in distress. Personal tutors are expected to be an early warning system for students in distress, which is particularly emphasised due to universities focus on retention. Some of the literature recognises this expectation, stating that "personal tutors are well placed to help with the identification of sudden onset or accumulating problems" (Smith, 2005: 44). Whilst the role of the personal tutor is there to support students, some authors argue that there needs to be greater support for the personal tutor, who may feel unprepared and overwhelmed when dealing with serious student personal issues. Luck highlights that many academics work in task-orientated disciplines with limited opportunity to develop inter-personal skills, which is at odds with the personal tutoring system which "requires them to attend to

students suffering personal crises or underlying psychological problems that they are ill-equipped to deal with” (2010: 278). Their article particularly focuses on the difficulties for staff handling student’s issues and whilst it is an older article, it seems unlikely that these issues have been resolved. Indeed, more recent articles suggest that the personal problems facing students have become more severe over time, with more diverse students experiencing more complex issues which staff may not be prepared for (McFarlane, 2016; Brown and Brymer, 2020; Wakelin, 2021).

McFarlane notes that some tutors relied on drawing on their own student experiences when providing support, but these could be limited to common experiences such as exam stress, and “the reality for contemporary students, including complex mental health and family issues, was very different from these expectations” (2016: 82). In Wakelin’s questionnaire to personal tutors, almost half of the respondents reported feeling “low levels of confidence as a personal tutor”, partly influenced by tutors feeling “they were not always prepared to deal with student issues” (2021: 11). The mismatch between expectations and the reality of a student in distress coming to a tutor with a complex, sensitive issue, is identified as a problem as tutors reported feeling less confident in their ability to support the student appropriately (McFarlane, 2016; Wakelin, 2021), which could create significant concerns for students who feel they can’t turn to their tutor.

There are risks that an inability to cope with the emotional nature of personal tutoring could impact students. Luck highlights that “individual academics without the resilience to deal with student projections of anger and blame at being unable to understand complex concepts may become depressed and defensive and react inappropriately to student demands” (2010: 283), suggesting that this defensiveness could lead to problematic reactions and students feeling unable to confide in their tutor. Whilst most personal tutoring is intended to provide a balance of academic and pastoral support and feature generally predictable concerns for most students, tutors can face unexpected disclosures of serious issues for students. Luck suggested that when staff are faced with “shocking disclosures from students”, they can be left “feeling suddenly exhausted, paralysed and unable to function” (ibid: 282). These significant negative reactions can impact the tutor’s own mental health and capacity to cope, which could be particularly detrimental to tutors who are perhaps not well suited to handling these disclosures and signposting procedures.

Grey and Osborne note that “most respondents did not agree that all academic staff should be personal tutors” and that “an institution should identify those staff who are best able to undertake the role if the tutoring system is to be effective” (2018: 293). This is echoed by Luck who notes the importance of acknowledging that “some academics are unwilling or unable to develop these more intimate relationships with students and take up this role” (2010: 279), arguing for tutor allocation based on the skills and traits of the individual, rather than universally signing up all academics for the role. The ethics of putting ill-equipped people into the personal tutoring role are beyond the scope of this review, but they should be considered as both a barrier to effective personal tutoring and a moral obligation to ensure nobody is at risk of mental harm when participating in the personal tutoring system.

The importance of training personal tutors to appropriately handle student issues is raised by various authors here, both to support the mental wellbeing of tutors, and to ensure distressed students are able to speak to someone who is prepared for disclosures. Luck highlights how staff development can improve tutors' confidence, through “discussion of the role of the tutor (including making clear that this is not a counselling role), the boundaries between the academic and personal tutoring role, and how to

refer students effectively (without students feeling rejected).” (2010: 279). Setting boundaries is also identified by McFarlane as key to building appropriate and healthy tutor-tutee relationships. She found that some tutors who had previously worked in a similar ‘helping role’, such as counselling, were aware of the importance of boundaries in the academic context, and not feeling “too drawn in to solving problems for people” (2016: 82). It is important for universities to support tutors in making these boundaries clear and ensuring alternative avenues of support are well-signposted too, as McFarlane’s tutor participants supported “greater linkage between the tutor and other layers of support and strategies to build the relationship between tutors and tutees” (ibid: 85). Other suggestions to improve support for tutors in handling complex personal issues included “a confidential phone line which tutors could use to discuss sensitive issues [and] using technology to enhance personal tutoring” (ibid); however, no literature analysed for this review went into significant detail as to how these suggestions might work, so it is difficult to ascertain which methods may be most effective in removing barriers and supporting staff.

Bureaucracy

A significant barrier to effective personal tutoring is university bureaucracy, which impacts some of the other barriers already mentioned, particularly around excessive workloads and management strategies to cope with these. Luck is particularly critical of university bureaucracy and notes that whilst many universities respond to the anxiety raised by challenges “by providing rituals to standardise procedures”, these rituals may inhibit “the development of relationships and ultimately leads to a worse student experience and achievement” (2010: 280). The rituals mentioned may be recognisable in university strategies of organising meetings through faceless VLEs or monitoring attendance of meetings through automated emails when students aren’t attending. Whilst these methods may relieve anxieties about timetabling and attendance monitoring policies for staff, students may feel lost in the system and crave human connection and empathy to relieve their own anxieties about university. Luck goes on to discuss the importance of universities providing the space and opportunity for staff and students to maintain the capacity to engage in university life, including personal tutoring. She notes:

> “Universities need to provide students and staff with a good and supportive environment to allow them to focus effectively on their primary tasks, but the response of the institution can be defensive and bureaucratic and work against effectiveness, giving rise to a punishing and persecuting environment. Academic staff can spend more time producing a paper trail to justify their teaching and assessment methods than interacting with students.” (2010: 281)

This statement highlights the need to remove barriers and defensiveness from the institutional level, which often has a significant negative impact on student and staff experiences of personal tutoring. Luck was writing in 2010, before further commercialisation of higher education with tuition fee rises in 2012, but parallels can be drawn between her observations and more recent literature. She notes that “As the institution feels more vulnerable to complaints from its customers (students), academic staff can become more defensive and entrenched in their position, and the overall culture of blame makes it difficult for staff to acknowledge their vulnerable feelings” (ibid). This suggests that academics feel less able to acknowledge their doubts and struggles as personal tutors, as pressures rise to prevent consumer complaints from students, and to deliver on promises made about the quality of education and support to align with rising fees. Therefore, staff may feel unable to raise issues and request

changes to their personal tutoring workload, or ask for further training, meaning issues are perpetuated indefinitely.

As early as 2009, the HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2009) were reporting that students prefer to be considered as partners in the learning experience at university, rather than as customers, and Luck suggests that “a shift towards this paradigm could be of benefit to HE in the UK” (2010: 281). However, this shift has not been strongly felt across the sector, as increased commercialisation has pushed some students to develop consumer-led attitudes, and for university management to perceive and treat students as their customers. This has likely led to increased bureaucracy and universities feeling the need to ‘tighten up’ their provision in terms of policies and procedures to demonstrate to regulators and prospective students their high-quality infrastructure, which may not necessarily have translated into real-life improvements to personal tutoring experiences and tutor-tutee relationships.

The difficulties caused by bureaucratic responses of universities can be exemplified by Luck’s account of how universities deal with students experiencing a personal crisis.

> “In response to a need to be seen as fair to all students and avoid potential and damaging court action, the University has developed a bureaucratic ‘Mitigating circumstances’ (MC) procedure where students who are unable to complete work or meet deadlines need to submit and provide evidence to be allowed a deferred attempt at the work. To be fair to all students, this process requires the evidence to be independent and does not allow academic staff to provide evidence to support the students. This can result in distressed students being unsupported, and academic tutors feeling that the decisions taken are grossly unfair. It is easy to see how feelings of frustration, powerlessness and guilt at not being able to provide a fair, supportive environment can result in a split between the ‘bad administration’ and ‘good nurturing academics’.” (ibid)

This example of the mitigating circumstances procedure highlights the troublesome administrative burden on already struggling students, which, in the interests of ‘fairness’, prevents their personal tutors supporting them through the process. Whilst Newcastle does not appear to have this same strictness, as personal tutors are often instrumental in supporting students applying for PECs and SSPs, there may be other similar areas where bureaucracy and ‘doing things right’ comes at a detriment to the most vulnerable students and is something to be aware of. Another example comes from Grey and Osborne, who found that in their survey of personal tutors “only a small majority of respondents believe that students should be allocated a tutor who teaches them on their programme, ideally in their first year” (2016: 291), which contradicts previous research which recommends this approach as facilitating belonging and creating connections between tutors and tutees (Thomas, 2012; Foster et al, 2012). Grey and Osborne suggest that support for this approach may be limited as “the logistical difficulty of trying to organise this results in many respondents thinking that it is not a good idea, or even possible” (2016: 291). Here, it seems that concerns about logistics, bureaucracy and administrative pressures are impacting on best practice and opportunities to foster belonging and success.

Whilst there is still limited research focusing specifically on bureaucracy as a barrier to effective personal tutoring, it seems apparent that issues of workload, lack of training and confusion over appropriate boundaries is all tied into the bureaucratic organisation of universities. Therefore, it is worthwhile that any personal tutoring programme examines its procedures thoroughly to ascertain where administrative

burdens or procedures implemented purely for bureaucracy's sake are reviewed and changed to be more effective for staff and students. This may impact on staff's capacity and comfort in undertaking personal tutor duties, and on student's experience and general value taken from personal tutoring, if they feel fully supported and not limited due to unnecessary administrative tasks or limitations.

External barriers to effective personal tutoring: for students

Whilst the barriers outlined in the previous section demonstrate how factors affecting tutors can then impact on the experience of their tutees too, it is important to consider other barriers to effective personal tutoring which may affect students more directly. Importantly, this is not to advocate a deficit model – a perspective which attributes academic failures or struggles to a personal deficiency in the individual – as many of the factors affecting students are structural and ingrained through social structures of education and concepts of social mobility. The barriers discussed focus more on how individuals may face additional barriers based on societal expectations of the performance of their demographic group or experiences. There are interesting perspectives from authors such as Yale, who discusses the 'psychological contract' that students form with their tutors (2020), and Raby who highlights the importance of student voice for successful personal tutoring, alongside systemic barriers international students often face (2020). This section will also bring together insights from Grey and Osborne, Luck and Stephen *et al*, who raise notions of students seeking authenticity and human connections in the context of the neoliberal university and rising student numbers, alongside the realities that students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds may need more intensive personal tutoring.

Mismatched expectations and psychological contracts

The literature suggests that there is often a mismatch between students' expectations of personal tutoring and the reality of the personal tutoring they engage with at university, as Yale reaffirms that across the sector there is "'no common experience' of a PT and that a gap exists between what students expect from a PT and what the system provides" (2017: 533). Some students don't understand the purpose of personal tutoring or why it's being offered to them, as they haven't expected this to be part of their university experience. Incoming students' expectations are largely influenced by their own prior experiences from school and their existing knowledge of university personal tutoring, often through "hearing about other people's experiences, such as family, peers and tutors" (ibid: 834). It is important to note that it is likely that those students with stronger pre-existing connections to higher education, often through a family background of graduates generally associated with middle-class educational experiences, who have a better understanding of personal tutoring from the beginning of their degree. Those students who have had limited exposure to the norms of higher education are more likely to be confused, have unrealistic – or even no – expectations, and be unsure about how to access support through their personal tutoring relationship. There is need for clarity on the role of the personal tutor from as early as possible, ideally integrated into induction programmes (Yale, 2020: 10; Wakelin, 2021), as the transition to university is an important stage where students are likely to need support and are

beginning to make sense of what is expected of them, and what they should expect from their university.

Yale expands on the risks of students mismatched expectations about personal tutoring through her 2020 article exploring psychological contract theory (commonly abbreviated to PC). A psychological contract is “the subjective beliefs concerning rights and responsibilities that an individual holds with regard to an exchange agreement between themselves and an organization, which ‘solidifies’ into a mental model” (O’Toole and Prince, 2015: 161). The theory argues that students’ beliefs about what obligations their university has towards them “develop from actual or implied promises made by organizational agents during the recruitment and socialization process” - for example, university marketing, websites, prospectuses and informal word of mouth (Yale, 2020: 2). These ‘promises’, perhaps around course content, support services and general offerings of the university, “form a mental framework of expectations and obligations and is the basis of the PC” (ibid). As the student’s PC is informed by what they are told by the university, there is a responsibility for the university to meet these expectations and deliver on what they have promised.

Importantly, if a student feels their expectations aren’t being met, they view this as a contract being breached and begin to react against the university, perhaps through “reducing their performance, acting out in less honorable ways, or may even consider leaving” (Yale, 2020: 3; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994). These expectations may, for example, relate to the student’s expectation of receiving the number of contact hours that was advertised to them in the university prospectus. There is a particular psychological contract formed “concerning the relationship with their personal tutor” (Yale, 2020: 2), meaning that a poor experience with their tutor could lead to students' performance being affected and a feeling of emotional betrayal if there is a perceived contract breach by the personal tutor.

These psychological contracts, in relation to personal tutoring relationships, can be breached in multiple ways: through delay of expected provision; students receiving less than expected; receiving different provision than what is expected; student feeling that the provision they’re receiving is unfair compared to others; and when the student perceives their contribution to be greater than the tutor’s (Yale, 2020: 3; Cassar and Briner, 2011). When considering some of the issues raised earlier in the literature review, such as inconsistency in personal tutoring provision due to high tutor workloads, there is clearly significant risk of a PC breach within the student-tutor relationship. Students may react to perceived breaches through choosing to leave the relationship, perhaps by refusing contact with the tutor, voicing their concerns, ignoring the breach and continuing as usual, or by acting out negative behaviours (Yale, 2020: 3; Rousseau, 1995). Yale suggests that these largely undesirable consequences of a breach can be mediated if the student has a stronger relationship with their tutor, as she noted that “having a well-developed relationship with the personal tutor was found to moderate any effects of breach, whether this related to the personal tutor relationship or wider experiences of the degree” (Yale, 2020: 8). Notably, a stronger tutoring relationship can offer greater support for students who feel like other aspects of their degree aren’t meeting their expectations, so the impact of the relationship goes beyond internal student-tutor mismatch of expectations or issues, to make a difference in the student’s perception of issues with their university experience more broadly.

The study from Yale spoke to students about their PC with their institution and personal tutor, raising some important points that could help us better understand personal tutoring. When students considered the availability of their personal tutor, those with better relationships and higher reported

trust perceived a lack of availability to be the fault of institutional demands, not the tutor themselves (ibid: 6). When students blamed the institution, “they felt that insufficient time was given for the personal tutor role [and interpreted this as] the institution not valuing student support (and therefore students)” (ibid). These reflections suggest that students will make their own interpretations about their institution based on the quality of their personal tutoring support, and often feel undervalued if they perceive the university as not prioritising personal tutoring. For some students, when they experienced a lack of availability from their tutors (a breach in their expectations of the amount of provision they would receive), they would attend meetings they felt were mandatory but would not share any problems, instead seeking support from other sources (ibid). For Yale, this response supports the notion that “experiencing a breach can lead to a reduction in motivation and effort...[students] will also go to other tutors for support in a form of protest or to avoid future interactions with the personal tutor” (ibid). Therefore, it is important to both manage expectations to a realistic level and ensure that there is institutional support and resources to maintain a reasonable level of communication between tutors and students.

There must be consistency in the quality of personal tutoring across all students, as they compare their experiences to their peers to test if they are getting a ‘fair deal’; depending on their findings, “this process of social comparison can result in either dissatisfaction and feelings of injustice at the inequity of support, or a strengthening of the relationship with their personal tutor and feelings of satisfaction” (ibid: 7). To facilitate this, Yale argues that a set of fair and consistent expectations needs to be outlined as early as possible for new students: “explicit articulation of expectations from the first meeting and ongoing negotiations would foster more positive relationships with students and help to mediate (and hopefully prevent) some of the effects of breach” (ibid: 10). The importance of setting clear boundaries and expectations is echoed by Grey and Osborne, alongside Trotter, who believe this is particularly important to support those students who are less inclined to engage in personal tutoring:

> “Staff may say that they are respecting the right of students to decline their participation in personal tutoring and therefore do not follow up on students who fail to attend, but the spirit of most personal tutoring policies is the provision of effective support. Arguably students must be engaged if the support is to be effective (Trotter 2004) and therefore institutions must ensure that they set clear expectations and identify clear benefits to students.” (Grey and Osborne, 2018: 290).

Developing and maintaining clear expectations is crucial to redress the balance of student’s early formation of psychological contracts and ensure these are based on realistic expectations, to reduce the risk of breaches and students feeling failed. This should also help less engaged students to feel like they understand how to engage when they do choose to, hopefully limiting the risks of students falling through the cracks through disengagement and a lack of understanding from their tutor. Whilst psychological contract theory may be unfamiliar to some, it offers an interesting insight into students’ sense-making processes and makes clear the value of a strong personal tutoring relationship in equipping students with the ability to handle issues on their course and feel like their needs for support are being appropriately met by their personal tutors.

Seeking an authentic connection

Multiple authors suggest that what many students are seeking through their personal tutor is an authentic connection, with the tutor relationship likely to be one of the few opportunities the student has to interact on a personal and relational level with a staff member within the context of the neoliberal university. This theme comes through all the way from Stephen *et al* in 2008, where the impact of increased marketisation of degrees, and higher student numbers alongside increasing numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds was already being seen. Stephen *et al* argue that students feel like a "wheel in the machine" (2008: 454), a phrase which echoes some current sentiments around students feeling that they're lost within the vastness of the university – or, as Stephen puts it, "lost in an uncaring system" (ibid). Now, there is the additional pressure of higher tuition fees, meaning students feel they're paying for an experience, which often comes with higher expectations of key components like personal tutoring (Wakelin, 2021). The literature grapples with the tension between the consumer-provider relationship and the genuine desire for students to feel like they matter to the staff they interact with, often facilitated through the personal tutoring relationship.

The tutor-student relationship has the potential to be very meaningful, as Drake highlights that personal tutors can provide "perhaps the only opportunity for all students to develop a personal, consistent relationship with someone in their institution who cares about them" (2011: 10). Contextualised within the vast institution of 'the University', this relationship can be particularly instrumental in preventing students from feeling like they are not cared about or not regarded as individuals by staff (Stephen et al, 2008: 454). Personal tutoring can be influential for new students, with Luck finding students reporting that "having a member of staff available to them who was interested in them as an individual helped to manage the anxieties in the transition to an otherwise faceless institution" (2010: 279). This connection continued throughout the students' time at university, developing a meaningful relationship during transition and beyond. Across different studies, students generally report that they highly value tutors who have key attributes of caring, being authentic, listening and making the effort to treat the student with respect (Stephen et al, 2008; Yale, 2017; Grey and Osborne, 2018; Raby, 2020). For Yale's participants, "the most important and overriding aspect of the relationships with tutors was that the participant had to feel that the tutor genuinely cared" and students made a link between 'getting on' with their tutor and experiencing higher levels of support (Yale, 2017: 540). The idea of genuine care or effort was echoed across other articles, reaffirming this student desire for an authentic and meaningful relationship with their personal tutor (Grey and Osborne, 2018; Dixon *et al*, 2019).

However, the issues raised earlier about students' expectations not meeting the reality of provision are relevant here too. Luck comments that some students expect their relationship with lecturers and staff to be similar to their relationships with teachers at school, but "this is unlikely to be realized with the large student numbers at university, and also does not match the expectations of the academics" (Luck, 2010: 276). As students expect, and want, a close relationship with staff, there can become a perception that "university students now seem more anxious and needy", causing concerns for tutors who cannot meet their students' needs (ibid). The earlier discussion of the issue of boundaries for tutors is mirrored here, with lack of clear boundaries potentially leading to "tutees becoming excessively demanding while constantly feeling rejected as their demands cannot be met" (ibid: 283). The clear benefits of a strong personal tutoring relationship must be balanced carefully with the risks, to both tutors and tutees, of overstepping boundaries and the relationship becoming problematic or potentially causing distress to either party.

'Institutionally invisible' students diverse needs

Whilst the literature studied thus far suggests that all students will find value in a high-quality personal tutoring relationship, some authors highlight how tutoring may be differently important for non-traditional students. Multiple authors argue that the increased numbers of 'widening participation cohorts' has led to more challenges and different expectations for tutors to tackle. For example, Brown and Brymer's 2020 article highlights the increase of student numbers over the past 40 years and the corresponding increase of more diverse student entrants:

> "The percentage of the population participating in Higher Education in the UK has risen substantially, from 13% in the early 1980's (Greenaway & Haynes, 2003) to 43% in 2009, and to 49% in 2015/16 (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2017). This shift has increased the number of students who are first generation to university and/or with fragmented learner identities (Kasworm, 2009), who juggle conflicting priorities and have limited or inaccurate true knowledge of the reality of HE experiences." (Brown and Brymer, 2020: 46)

Although this literature review will report these arguments from the literature, it does not perpetuate a deficit model for non-traditional students and aims to understand how the structural realities of higher education can adapt to better support students with more complex needs, rather than expecting the student to change. It is important to focus on the ways personal tutoring can impact non-traditional students' experiences, especially in the contemporary context of higher education, as Swain asserts that "the diverse backgrounds of today's students mean that the role of personal tutor is more important than ever" (2008); this argument will be explored throughout this section.

The increased level of structural barriers that non-traditional students face when entering university is likely to mean they need more support from personal tutors (Wakelin, 2021). More students are likely to be starting university as the first in their family to pursue higher education, meaning they're often less equipped with understandings of higher education and how to succeed at university, "disadvantaged by an absence of meaningful guidance based on experience by those who influence them" (Brown and Brymer, 2020: 48). Richardson introduces the importance of personal tutoring that empowers students to integrate into "the academic structure and social life of the institution" (2000: 6), which is often more unfamiliar for students who have limited knowledge about how universities work. With approximately a third of new university students now coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (HESA, 2013; Brown and Brymer, 2020: 46), increasing numbers of students are likely to lack the economic, social and cultural capital that students are expected to embody to succeed in academia (Bourdieu, 1986). Kasworm highlights that "such students are particularly vulnerable to lack of confidence and self-worth, and increased fear of failure, and face the danger of not meeting academic standards due to marginalised identities and institutional invisibility" (2010: 146).

This notion of 'institutional invisibility' can be used to emphasise the important role that student voice can play in improving personal tutoring practices, particularly when used to raise awareness of the needs and challenges of under-represented student groups. Brown and Brymer argue that "a systemic approach situating regular dialogue with a dedicated personal tutor is invaluable" (2020: 48), and particularly emphasise the "central role of rich student-centred dialogue" (ibid: 46). The concept of

being student-centred is not new to universities, who have become increasingly invested in consulting students on suggested changes, but there are different ideas about how this may be actualised.

For example, Brown and Brymer's study compared a curriculum-integrated model of personal tutoring with an embedded coaching model at two different universities, both approaches designed to facilitate richer and more focused student-tutor dialogue (ibid: 56). The coaching approach was designed to help students be more active in the meetings by identifying strengths, weaknesses and aspirations, working with their coach to guide them through scheduled coaching sessions. There is some suggestion that coaching could be beneficial for students struggling to fit in at university, through working with students on the tools they need to explore their identity and experiences themselves, as they argue that "issues of 'fragmented identity' are raised and tackled in a positive future focused way through the development of coaching skills, with its emphasis on identity, values, awareness and personal effectiveness" (ibid). However, there is not a particularly strong basis of evidence to suggest that coaching is more beneficial than high quality, student-centred personal tutoring, although both approaches have their own positives.

The centring of student voice in personal tutoring is explored in Raby's study (2020), first through surveying and interviewing a broad cohort, and then through a more specific focus on the personal tutoring experiences of international students. Raby sees student voice as important, particularly when it involves students having more control of their university experiences and opportunity to influence change, and when questioning the power dynamics in student-staff relationships (ibid: 3). When students were asked about whether they saw themselves as partners with their tutors, Raby found that "most students feel that they have a voice" (ibid: 7) but "a small number found their tutor distant or unfamiliar" (ibid: 1). For those with less frequent contact with their tutor, the relationship could be perceived to be more passive and unsatisfying, linking in with Yale's (2020) concerns about students becoming disengaged with personal tutoring if it isn't satisfying their expectations.

To delve more into the experiences of international students, who are non-traditional and diverse students, Raby focused on the particular barriers these students face and how personal tutoring could play a role in overcoming these. The notion of students as equal partners in relationships with tutors can be unfamiliar for some international students, as they may be used to cultures where staff are seen as authority figures and maintaining distance is seen to be respectful (Wheeler and Birtle, 1993). This could make developing a strong relationship more difficult, and impact how confident a student feels in asking for help; "McDonald (2014) affirms this, in finding that international students were reluctant to speak to an academic, and may therefore miss out on important support" (Raby, 2020: 4). International students who participated in the study "stated that they would like tutors to be willing to go the extra mile in their support to help them overcome culture shock and adapt to a new environment" (ibid). With these unique needs, international students may require alternative styles of tutoring to the styles that suit home students, to ensure they are able to participate in personal tutoring and experience similar positive impacts to those of home students. Raby acknowledges that specialist training may be required for tutors with international tutees to overcome the difficulties of being able to "form a relationship as equals" (ibid: 7) and provide the support needed. Some international students suggested techniques for achieving their goals of receiving additional help adjusting to a new culture at university:

> "A group of international direct entry students into level 3 were provided with bespoke tutorials around transitioning into study in another culture, and these students stated that the sessions

> they received were incredibly beneficial. On the use of case studies, one student stated: “This case is very easy to understand. It had a lot of the same problems as me.” These students stated that they would prefer more of this support, in agreement that more intercultural support would be beneficial (Lochtie, 2016), and support should continue beyond induction (Leask and Carroll (2011).” (Raby, 2020: 7)

With personal tutors often being seen to be “cultural navigators” for new students who need help to “acclimatise to the academic environment” (Miller, 2016: 45), it appears feasible for tutors to be well situated to provide additional levels of support for international students acclimatising to both an academic, and general environment, that is unfamiliar. Raby concludes that “personal tutors have an incredibly important role to play in providing an outlet for the student voice, particularly those whose voices are not regularly heard” (2020: 8); the literature indeed suggests that there is need for student-centred personal tutoring provision and for tutors to support their students diverse needs, with appropriate training and support to facilitate a positive tutor-tutee relationship.

Drawing conclusions

This literature review has explored various practices and perspectives of personal tutoring in UK higher education institutions, aiming to highlight how evidence-informed practice is necessary to cultivate high quality and effective personal tutoring relationships. Thomas states that “effective personal tutoring is proactive, integrated, structured and nurtures relationships” (2012: 42), a conclusion that aligns with many of the findings this literature review has synthesised. Whilst different institutions will have different ideas about what ‘integrated’ and ‘structured’ means in their personal tutoring context, and it is impossible to make overarching recommendations, there are some themes that should be considered when re-assessing the state of personal tutoring in each individual context. The importance of co-creation with students, setting expectations, evaluating current practices to better understand their impact, and considering how technological advancements could elevate personal tutoring will be discussed in this final concluding section.

Making co-created expectation setting a priority

The literature makes various points about the importance of setting expectations for personal tutors and their tutees, and the risks to engagement and overall feelings about personal tutoring if clear expectations aren’t outlined early (Grey and Osborne, 2018; Yale, 2020; Brown and Brymer, 2020). Whilst universities do make information about personal tutoring available to tutors and tutees, often through websites and handbooks, the literature suggests that more needs to be done to clarify the role of the tutor and what tutors and tutees should expect from personal tutoring. With a clearer role definition, clearer boundaries and expectations will follow, which would likely lead to better tutoring experiences and less risk of mismatched expectations or blurred boundaries. Grey and Osborne admit that their study “did not explicitly consider the setting of expectations as part of the tutoring process”

but recognise that expectations are needed to be able to monitor and evaluate personal tutoring processes effectively (2018: 295). The way these expectations may look requires further thought, but one suggestion from Grey and Osborne is to consider their set of principles for effective personal tutoring. These principles (see Appendix 1) are rooted in findings from their own study and their literature review, aiming to set out clear principles in three key areas: “the process, the operation and delivery of personal tutoring, and the responsibilities of staff and students” (ibid). By considering these principles, universities could investigate whether these work for their institutional understandings and beliefs about how effective personal tutoring could be achieved and adapt or implement these into their own policies to improve visibility of their expectations for personal tutoring.

As well as grounding practice in evidence, it is important to collaborate with students, who have lived experience of tutoring and can add new insights to decision-making processes. Co-creating with students as partners is key for multiple authors throughout the literature review; for example, Grey and Osborne suggest that “both staff and students should be collaboratively involved” in work to improve the student experience, including personal tutoring (ibid). Partnership working is highlighted particularly by Raby, who argues that “personal tutors have an incredibly important role to play in providing an outlet for the student voice, particularly those whose voices are not regularly heard” (2020: 8). Wakelin’s action research involved co-creation between staff and student participants, based on the belief that “any intervention should be more effective if those impacted by the issue are involved in creating the solution to the problem” (Wakelin, 2020: 7). Through this research, they found that expectation setting was established early in the induction process, with all first-year students having an induction seminar with their personal tutor, alongside other induction activities aimed at fostering stronger staff-student relationships (Wakelin, 2020: 5). By introducing tutors and tutees in induction, the tone is set for contact throughout the rest of the degree and expectations about availability and content can be made clear from the start, which is important as they found that “if the purpose of meetings is not clear, students are unlikely to engage with these meetings with their personal tutor” (ibid). By hearing from both staff and students in the research, Wakelin discovered a shared feeling that unstructured meetings were not helpful, as “students were raising issues beyond the remit of personal tutors, reemphasising the lack of boundaries in the role”; the research established the need for structure and clear purpose (ibid: 10).

Mann’s research into co-creating advising services with students at an Australian university investigated how design thinking can offer new insights into partnering with students when designing advising activities (2020). There are some similarities between the Australian and UK higher education contexts, with similar degree lengths and discipline choices decided from the beginning of the degree, although personal tutors (or ‘academic advisors) are not common in Australian universities. Melbourne University, the subject of the study, has recently introduced academic advisors to foster better staff-student connections (ibid: 2). Design thinking is a set of methods, thinking and practices which “places people at the heart of decision making by using an empathy-based, user-centred process of problem solving” (ibid: 3) and Mann argues “provides a way to systematically and productively engage students as co-creators in designing, re-designing or improving services and learning experiences that they have defined, tested, and validated as relevant, engaging, and timely” (ibid). Various projects focused on improving the international student arrival experience, designing personalised student personas and offering peer advising opportunities. Whilst not all of these projects relate directly to the way personal tutoring is conceptualised in the UK, the value Mann puts on co-creation and for staff to “listen deeply

and effectively to student voices, to lived experiences, and to learner insights" (ibid: 7) demonstrates the importance institutions around the world are placing on student partnership to develop effective practices.

Committing to evaluation and improvement

A commitment to ongoing evaluation of personal tutoring policy and practices is clearly important to multiple authors included throughout, some of whom acknowledge the difficulties of evaluating personal tutoring without defining learning outcomes or measurable goals for students. Grey and Osborne argue that "defining measurable student outcomes for personal tutoring is a fundamental foundation of an evaluation and enhancement process" and highlight that "personal tutoring systems are rarely evaluated in UK HEIs" (2018: 291). Importantly, they are clear that evaluation is crucial to create any meaningful change to personal tutoring provisions (ibid). Where defined student outcomes are lacking, there could be opportunity for universities to define these in partnership with students, and utilising long-standing methodologies such as theory of change to begin to understand the impacts they intend personal tutoring to have for student outcomes and experiences.

Some of the work observed for this literature review demonstrated their commitment to learning from their own research by implementing changes to personal tutoring based on their findings and insights. A clear early example of this is Stephen *et al*, who introduced changes during their research as they felt the concerns were important enough to take fast action. For example, they timetabled additional personal tutor meetings for first year students midsemester, after finding that was when challenges often emerged. One change which would have the potential to benefit all new students, but particularly non-traditional students, was offering a lecture with a "Student Counsellor on the transition to higher education to encourage students to reflect upon their motivations, aspirations and needs whilst familiarising them with the support services available and the place of personal tutors therein" (Stephen *et al*, 2008: 457). After seeing the clear need for more support with transition from their research findings, this change could have significant impact. They also strengthened tutor meeting structures beyond the first-year students, set out structures and guidance on tutor-tutee contact, developed workshops and training sessions for tutors, and created a new Personal Tutoring Co-Ordinator role (ibid: 458). These examples highlight that changes can be made on the basis of research, and that they can be implemented at pace when needed. It is worth noting that there hasn't been any follow-up literature found to evaluate the impact of these changes implemented by Stephen *et al*, which would be useful to map impact of these potential interventions.

Similarly, Wakelin created a staff development strategy for personal tutoring from her action research, modifying plans based on reflection and evaluation. Action research is closely aligned with evaluating practice and identfiying areas of improvement (McNiff, 2016), as "it is not simply about collecting data but using that action and acting upon the data to create positive changes" (Wakelin, 2020: 6). By gathering staff and student feedback throughout her research, Wakelin tailored actions to the needs and wants of those key stakeholder groups. For example, she included a "definition of the personal tutor in a newly designed staff handbook and a student booklet about personal tutors" (ibid: 13). The handbook and booklet were designed in consultation with staff and students who had been involved in

the research as participants, demonstrating how this reflective process could be beneficial to ensure resources were fit for purpose and more likely to be effective. Wakelin's work also led to the creation of personal tutor meeting plans to aid with structuring sessions, the implementation of a reflection wheel to assist students with setting goals, and the launch of a personal tutoring training programme. The personal training programme, based within Nottingham Law School, aims to improve the confidence and competence of personal tutors, "developed in response to this research" (ibid: 14). With Wakelin planning to analyse the impact of the resources and training programme (ibid), this offers a strong example of best practice of implementing changes based on evidence and ensuring their continued effectiveness by committing to ongoing evaluation.

Innovations in personal tutoring delivery – what next?

Some of the articles explored have questioned the traditional models of personal tutoring and whether technology can support new innovations in the delivery and monitoring of personal tutoring. A few of these will be mentioned, to highlight new possibilities for universities to consider when evaluating their current practices and looking to the future of personal tutoring.

McIntosh *et al* argue that 'flipped advising' models can create a "Third Space" (Bhabba, 1994; Gutierrez, 2008) where "hybrid identifications are possible and where cultural transformations can happen" (McIntosh et al, 2020: 2). For the context of tutoring and advising, this concept of the Third Space can "open up key avenues of dialogue and enquiry to support true partnership working and facilitate learning" (ibid). By using blended learning environments and their technology to enhance tutor-tutee partnerships, McIntosh argues we can "reclaim the student voice" and utilise the Third Space as a space of greater equality and participation, likely to support non-traditional students to engage more with personal tutoring (ibid). The use of virtual learning environments, such as Canvas, or e-Portfolios are suggested as facilitating "a more interactive and frequent student as partners constructive, dialogic relationship" and increasing the capacity for quality conversations between tutors and tutees, making use of these learning technologies (ibid: 3). ePortfolio is specifically mentioned as being a useful space for students to share evidence of their learning and experiences with their tutor, which helps them understand the student experience more fully; interestingly, Rowley and Munday expand on this to suggest:

> "ePortfolio development encourages students' 'sense of self' through a process of skills-uptake such as organization; collecting and classifying of evidence; utilization of tools; and reflection on and in discipline-specific knowledge, learning, and tasks; and higher order thinking skills such as synthesis and evaluation of learning" (Rowley and Munday, 2014: 78).

In the Newcastle context, ePortfolio has been increasingly less mandated for tutors to track meetings and doesn't appear to have been clearly intended to develop this 'sense of self' for students. McIntosh *et al* raise interesting questions as to whether ePortfolio, and similar learning technologies, can be used in more meaningful ways to improve the personal tutoring experience for tutors and tutees. The co-creation of online Third Space and blended personal tutoring models could be an innovative step forward to encourage tutors and tutees to engage with activities and discussions before face-to-face meetings, build stronger relationships, and ultimately offers opportunities for tutors and students to

“work together, in partnership, to unpack these perspectives, to challenge one another, and to reach mutual decisions about support and to agree ways forward” (McIntosh *et al*, 2020: 5).

Another paper considering the use of learning technologies to support personal tutoring focuses on the potential for learning analytics to enhance communication between tutors and tutees, to improve quality of support and increased student engagement (Lowes, 2020: 1). Lowes acknowledges that data alone is not enough and argues that the heuristic of the Johari Window is a “possible tool to stimulate thinking and to integrate the information from learning analytics into a meaningful framework in order to develop a powerful way of knowing tutees better and thus creating more supportive relationships with them” (ibid). The sector is beginning to take notice of the benefits of using learning analytics, with JISC arguing that “learning analytics can help to improve the quality of teaching, cut drop-out rates, build better relationships between students and staff and empower students to take ownership of their learning” (Feldman, 2016). For personal tutoring specifically, there are emerging suggestions that learning analytics dashboards can facilitate more effective personal tutoring (Sclater et al, 2016), but this evidence is still limited. Data about students, such as their engagement with online learning platforms, measures of access to the library and other campus buildings, can be measured and tracked via learning analytics dashboards. The University of Plymouth, for example, uses learning analytics to “support academics in managing personal tutoring” through a staff-facing dashboard containing necessary reports, metrics and data, such as “course information, attendance data, submission details, and marks” for individual students (Lowes, 2020: 3). Whilst Lowes suggests there can be benefits to linking these analytics to personal tutoring, it is important to note that some students in other studies have been concerned that tutors having access to their data “could lead to assumptions being made about them, and them being labeled” and other students have “perceived it negatively as a “big brother” approach” (Lowes, 2020: 3; Roberts *et al*, 2016).

Lowes and others argue that “analytics systems and dashboards are only a tool to be used rather than a definitive solution to problems with engagement and retention” (2020: 3; Grey et al, 2017). To make sense of the data, Lowes suggests using the Johari Window as a model of understanding an individual’s self-awareness (see Appendix 2):

> The Johari Window is a quadrant, described by Luft as “A graphic model of awareness in interpersonal relations” (Luft, 1961). It focuses on knowledge about a person (or group of people) with two dimensions: self and other, and two values: known and not known. (Lowes, 2020: 5).

In personal tutoring, Lowes argues that “the framework of the Johari window can help to raise awareness of how much tutors (do not) know about their tutees and suggest strategies for transforming the information provided into knowledge and insight, in order to know tutees better and hence to build a better relationship” (ibid: 6). By acknowledging areas of the student’s identity where the tutor has little knowledge, using this model, Lowes suggests that learning analytics can enhance this knowledge through student data dashboards. For example, tutors may notice through analytics that their tutee avoided choosing modules with exams and talk to the student to learn whether this was coincidence, or out of a particular fear of exams or preference for alternative assessment types for the student, enabling the tutor to better understand them and offer more support if necessary (ibid: 8). This way of thinking about the potential utility of learning analytics to foster more detailed personal tutoring relationships

based on greater understanding of the students' needs and wants could be an interesting avenue to explore.

Final reflections

Throughout this extensive literature review, rich and interesting insights into personal tutoring perspectives and practices have been explored in depth. From defining the models of personal tutoring and highlighting the impact that personal tutoring can have on students, to interrogating the barriers that tutors and tutees are facing whilst trying to build a strong relationship, the literature review has aimed to root all comments in robust evidence. With careful consideration of the unique ways personal tutoring may differently impact diverse students from a range of experiences and backgrounds, the work hopes to offer insights into potential opportunities to adapt personal tutoring provision to be better for all students. There is more work to be done in the world of personal tutoring, as studies are still limited and there is a risk of over-reliance on older work which may not accurately reflect the realities of personal tutoring today. However, there is strong evidence to suggest that high quality personal tutoring can make a real difference to students, and that there are multiple methods that could be implemented to improve personal tutoring and explore new ways of fostering the important tutor-tutee relationship.

Appendix 1

Table 4. A set of principles for effective personal tutoring.

The personal tutoring process
The tutoring/advising process requires student engagement in an intentional and structured programme of meaningful activities
The tutoring/advising process has a clearly defined and published set of student (learning) outcomes
Tutoring/advising supports student academic, personal, and professional development
Tutoring/advising is personalised to the needs of individual students
Tutoring/advising involves (collaborative) goal/target setting, and monitoring of achievements against targets
Tutoring/advising helps students learn how to learn, and to engage in effective study practices
Tutors help students to interpret assessment results and feedback to improve their academic performance
Tutoring/advising helps students understand and adjust to the differences between studying in higher education and studying at school/FE college
Staff and students set mutual expectations
The operation and delivery of personal tutoring
All students **must** have a tutor
Students are allocated a tutor who teaches them on their programme, ideally in the first year of the programme
Students retain the same tutor throughout their degree programme
Not all academic staff are required to act as personal tutors
Students are notified of the name of their tutor and given their contact details before they join the university
Tutors contact students and begin the tutoring relationship before students join the university
Personal tutoring involves both one-to-one and group meetings with a tutor
All years of the degree programme have equal importance for tutoring/advising, and the first transitional year should not have greater importance than subsequent years
A defined schedule for meetings exists and is published to students. Tutor meetings should appear in students' timetable
Students meet tutors at least twice per semester, regardless of whether they feel they need the meeting
A nominated, experienced tutor (senior tutor) exists in each school/department. The senior tutor should take responsibility for overseeing tutoring provision and tutor development in that school/department
The tutoring/advising process is continually evaluated to ensure that it is meeting its stated objectives
Responsibilities and expectations of personal tutors
Tutors follow up on students who miss tutorial meetings – attendance at tutorials should be taken as seriously as attendance at teaching sessions
Tutors keep records of personal tutorial meetings
Tutors engage with students outside scheduled tutorial meetings and teaching sessions
All tutors commit to, and regularly engage in, training and Continuous Professional Development relating to their personal tutoring practice

Appendix 2

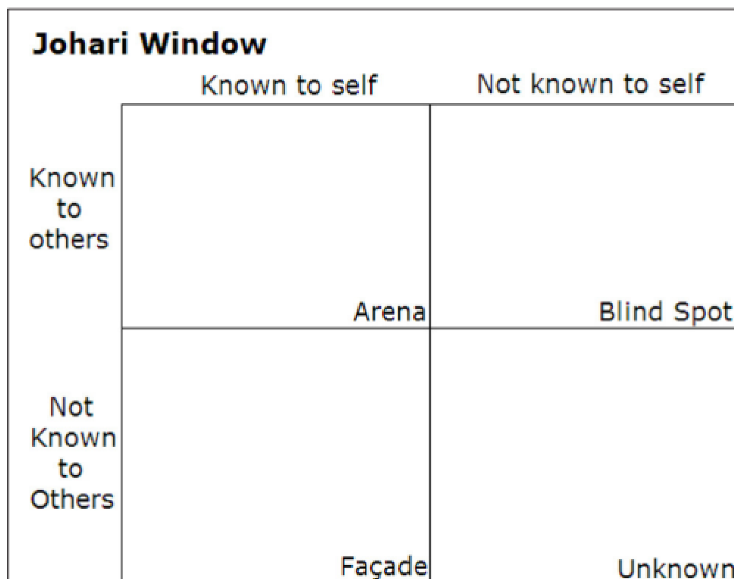

FIGURE 2 | Johari Window.

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