

March 2020

Vice President of Education
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PAT Report



CHESTER
STUDENTS'
UNION

CSU's Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) Campaign Report March 2020

Since January I have been undergoing a Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) campaign to evaluate the current PAT system and how effective it is for students. Throughout the campaign I have been in constant contact and liaising with Chris Haslam, Louise Chaddock and Sara Lawton to make sure that the campaign reached all areas of the university. The campaign has been well received by both students and staff with a number of students engaging in the Me and My PAT hashtag on social media.

A survey for the campaign was released on the 30th January this was open until the 6th March. The survey was released to all undergraduate students through email and social media, to understand the undergraduate student experience of our PAT system. In total there were 633 responses, with 43% of those being level 6 students. The number of students responding to the survey from each level can be seen in more detail in figure 1 below. In total there were seven core questions with one side question depending on the participants answer to the previous question. To gain an idea of the demographic of the students, we asked:

- What level of study are you?
- Are you a single or combined honours student?
- Which department do you study in?

On reflection, to add more value to the data a question around which campus the student studies on could have been added in. Once the survey had closed the data was inputted into SPSS to undergo a thorough statistical analysis.

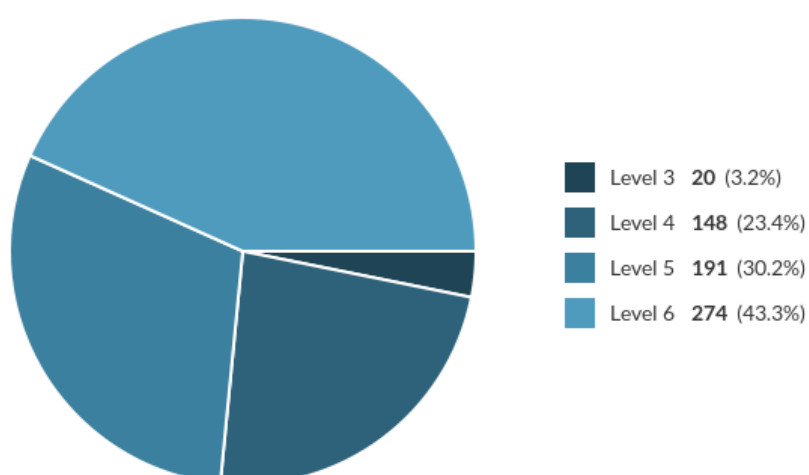


Figure 1: A pie chart showing the level of study each participant was in

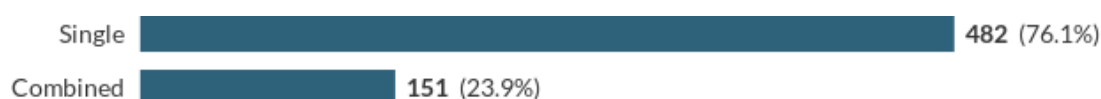


Figure 2: A bar chart showing the percentage of participants who were single or combined honours

Results

Attending PAT Meetings

The reasoning behind this campaign was built on comments from students on their experience with the PAT system. As VP education I had received numerous passing comments about the PAT system and how students were not finding it effective or benefiting them. One of the most alarming comments that I had heard was students weren't even meeting their PAT throughout their time at university.

Questions 1 and 4 of the survey were used to create a crosstabulation table examining if students were meeting their PAT. The results of this can be seen in figure 3.

Do you know who your PAT is? * What level of study are you at?
Crosstabulation

Count

		What level of study are you at?				
		Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Total
Do you know who your PAT is?	Yes	20	146	190	267	623
	No	0	2	1	7	10
Total		20	148	191	274	633

Figure 3: Crosstabulation between the level of study and whether students have met their PAT or not

In total the number of students who had not seen their PAT was 10 out 633, this is clearly a considerably low number which is great (2.5%). There were a number of comments from students highlighting the fantastic services their PAT offers them, below are a select few comments from students regarding their PATs. Many other students comment how it was great to have a staff member to go to for any help and for them to care about you personally.

Psychology level 4 student – *“I’m having a lovely experience with my PAT, and feel she is helping me when I need it. I do feel it should be made easier for students to be able to ask to change their PAT if the rapport isn’t being built effectively. This should be done without fear of being ridiculed, maybe a mid-year request could be useful?”*

Graphic design level 6 student - *“I have had a good experience; my PAT has been easily contactable and have had at least two meeting in each year.”*

When looking into more detail about why certain students did not meet their PAT the comments that were found were:

Education level 6 student - *“I didn’t know I had a PAT”*

Criminology level 4 student - "I would have liked to have been introduced at the beginning of course. My initial meeting never happened in the first week although I spent an hour trying to find them."

Health and social care level 6 student – "I don't know who they are"

Out of the 623 who knew who their PAT was, 112 of them have not attended a one-to-one meeting with them. This equates to just under 18%, I myself know how important these meetings are and how essential they were to my student experience at university. I personally had a fantastic PAT who was attentive and always readily available if I ever needed help. It's great to see that on the whole the results are positive, but I'm concerned that the small amount missing out are not receiving the great pastoral care that I experienced.

Do you know who your PAT is? * Have you had a one-to-one with your PAT? Crosstabulation

Count

		Have you had a one-to-one with your PAT?		
		Yes	No	Total
Do you know who your PAT is?	Yes	511	112	623
	No	0	10	10
Total		511	122	633

Figure 4: Crosstabulation between question 4 and 6

Eleanor Lewis the Students Union President details her PAT experience below:

"My PAT met once a year with me. In my final year, I arranged a meeting with her, my name was written on her door booking a slot, I walked in, sat down and she didn't know who I was, my name or that I was a final year until I talked about my dissertation. The meeting was pointless as she didn't know my name and didn't ask me, so she brought up none of my files to find out anything about me. In my second year, I made a meeting with her to say I was struggling with my mental health and was experiencing severe anxiety, panic attacks and depression and she said 'well we all get a bit sad sometimes' and that was it... no signposting to any support or anything! My PAT changed in February of my final year to an amazing one who met with me straight away. I told her how I had been struggling and that morning I had been to hospital with a panic attack, and she marched me to student futures, helped me access that support and continued to follow up with me and how I was going after that"

The effect a PAT has on a student's overall experience at the university, using Eleanor's and my own experience as an example it is clear that there is a need for an improvement in the consistency of PATs attitudes towards students.

Response times from PATs

Out of those respondents who answered 'No' to 'Have you had a one-to-one meeting with your PAT?' a follow up question of why this was the case was asked. This was an open text question, there were three key themes that came from the responses:

1. Lack of responding to emails from the PAT
2. Inconsistency with changing PATs
3. Either the student or PAT were unavailable

In total there were 59 responses which alluded to some sort of lack of communication between the PAT and student (out of the 122 responses for question 6A). This lack of communication is allowing students to go through university without seeking that extra help, this is even more important for level 6 students who would often use their PAT for an academic reference. Below are a select few of the comments taking from question 6A regarding a lack of communication:

Adult Nursing level 4 student – "PAT is impossible to connect with as he barely answers emails"

PGCE level 6 student – "My PAT would not reply to my emails nor would get in contact with me for the entire of the first term. I have since requested a PAT change and they have been better"

Law and criminology level 6 student – "Bad communication, tried to arrange meeting and ended with no reply"

There were multiple comments from students saying that the only reason they hadn't attend was either the PAT was busy when the student was free or vice versa. This is very positive to hear as it is a very quick and easy fix, one student commented how psychology uses an online booking system for their PAT appointments.

Awareness – The Importance of a PAT

There is an ongoing issue with awareness for both students and PATs. Students struggle to understand the importance of PATs and how they can utilise them effectively. Using the survey as evidence there are numerous comments regarding students not knowing who their PAT is or why they have one. Across the university there seems to be a lack of introduction to PATs in the induction period, this is allowing students to go months without ever seeing any pastoral support.

From the student perspective there is consensus around PATs needing more mental health training in order to support students. Signposting students to the correct services is appropriate but there is a need for constant follow up from the PAT to ensure the student has received the help they need.

The final question of the survey was 'How could your experience of the PAT system be improved?', again this was a free text question and the answers reflect the above.

Accounting and Finance level 4 student – “More clarity on what they are able to do”

Languages level 5 student – “Slightly better mental health training”

Psychology level 5 student – “Reassured your Pat is there to help you and not be in charge of you or tell you off”

Language level 5 student – “Give them training or ideas on how to deal with a student who has mental health difficulties rather than trying to ignore it or say that it’s not important”

Conclusion

To conclude myself and the officers found this campaign extremely insightful into the student’s experiences of our PAT system at the University of Chester. Although many students receive a positive experience of our PAT system, there is a clear need for improvement to target every student.

As a students’ union we have appreciated the universities help and cooperation with the survey and would welcome the opportunity to work on any future plans regarding the PAT system and the recommendations I have provided below.

Recommendations

- UoC to hold underperforming PATs to account and to create a reporting system for students to highlight any concerns regarding their experience
- CSU to work with UoC annually to raise awareness of the PAT system and the benefits for students of meeting with their PAT aiming to encourage student attendance at PAT meetings.
- UoC to create an online booking system across all faculties for PAT appointments
- Provide Departments with the data, so they can analysis the results, learn from the positive comments from students and work to address any issues raised by students.
- Training for all PATs – a set standard of practice on what students can expect, the role of the PAT and ensure all PATs are trained sufficiently in mental health
- All PATs respond to students in a timely matter – production of communication policy to ensure this is consistent across faculties
- An increase in promotion of PATs around induction week