

SAS student retention plan - Personal Development Tutoring Initiative

Introduction

As part of a wider retention strategy, SAS piloted a new PDT model for 2023-24. The initiative included pre-arrival engagement with each student receiving an email introducing their PDT and information about meeting the tutor in person. Timetabled or group PDT activities in Week 1 was the aspiration, but all PDT tutees were to be offered a PDT meeting within weeks 1-3 (Thomson, 2012, 2017).

To support timetabled and group PDT workshops a SAS PDT Evaluation group* collaborated with DLTE to develop Learning Outcomes and to design a strength-based community building workshop that would foster engagement, community and ability to self-manage and navigate university resources. This has become known as the Welcome week Scavenger Hunt with materials now available to the wider university.

An Evaluation survey obtained student demographic markers, evaluation of the PDT actions, measures of confidence and ease using university resources, and measures of Belonging (Yorke, 2016) and Mattering (Elliot et al., 2004).

- Belong subscales – belongingness; engagement; self-confidence
- Mattering subscales – importance; awareness; reliance

Demographic markers

Students were recruited via in class messaging with QR code and link, and by email from SAS administrators. Participation was voluntary. Demographic characteristics of being first in family to attend university, type of accommodation (*with family; student accommodation; own home*) and identifying as disabled had no observable effect on scores of Belonging or Mattering. These factors are described in the companion document and are not included in any further analyses.

N=138

Age 17 – 44 years (mean 22.01, s.d. 5.66)

55 – Biological Sciences; 23 – Psychology; 8 – Sport Science; 49 – Social Science; 3 not identified

118 signed up using the link, 20 using the QR code

- 62/138 (44.9%) were first in family to attend university
- 26/138 (18.8%) identified as having a disability
- 61/138 (44.2%) student; 59/138 (42.8%) family; 18 (13%) own home

SAS PDT Evaluation group* - Alex McIntyre SAS PDT Lead, PL Psychology & Psychology with Sociology; Colin McGill, PL Teacher Education, SAS Welcome Week Lead; Christine Haddow, PL Criminology; Susan Meldrum; Margarida Dias-Scoon, PL Sport and Exercise Science

Navigating Resources – Impact on measures of belonging and mattering

Ease of navigating resources at Edinburgh Napier University was shown to have strong effects on student scores of Belonging and Mattering.

- Students who know how to contact their PDT tutor (89.1%) show stronger measures of Belonging (*Belongingness subscale, p .011*) and stronger Mattering scores (*Importance, p .008; Reliance, p .056*).
- Finding it easier to connect with students (61.9%) was associated with better Belonging (*all subscales p <.001*) and Mattering (*awareness, p.006; reliance, p. 009*).
- Finding it easier to navigate resources on campus (78.9%) showed significantly better Belonging (*all subscales p <.005*) and better Mattering (*reliance, p.007*).
- Finding it easier to navigate MyNapier showed better Belonging (*p =.014*) and Mattering (*awareness, p<.001; importance, p. 035*).
- Ease of using myAcc showed marginally better Belonging (*belongingness subscale, p .052*) but no effect on Mattering (*n.s.*).

*There is a significant impact of being able to navigate the Napier environment on whether our students feel that they belong and that they matter to us. Increased Mattering - Reliance scores also indicate that those students have a sense of competence and mastery with which they can support their peers. **The PDT workshop and early PDT communication** was designed to foster engagement and integration within the Edinburgh Napier community; our evidence suggests that we have been successful in this and that we should continue to identify practice that increases community, belonging and self-reliance. Continuing early and pre-arrival PDT engagement is important, as is using **group sessions to foster integration within the student cohort**. Ability to find and **navigate resources** within the university is a clear driver in fostering a sense of belonging, mattering and ownership, and should be a focus of student engagement activities.*

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PDT Engagement - Impact on measures of Belonging and Mattering

Pre-arrival Communication

Students who received a **pre-arrival PDT email** reported higher Belongingness scores than those who did not receive the email ($p .047$). Mattering scales were not impacted by receiving the email, although knowing how to contact the PDT tutor (89.1%) did significantly impact Mattering scores (*Importance*, $p .008$; *Reliance*, $p .056$).

- 101 (73.2%) received a welcome email from their tutor
- 19 (13.8%) did not receive a welcome email from their tutor
- 17 (12.3%) don't know whether they received an welcome email
- 1 did not answer
- **89.1% know how to contact their PDT**

Students who received a **pre-arrival PDT email** reported higher Belongingness scores than those who did not receive the email and students who know how to contact their PDT tutor show stronger measures of Belonging and Mattering scores. The pre-arrival email is fundamental to ensuring that this information is clearly transmitted.

PDT Meeting or Workshop

Students who were not offered a PDT meeting recorded lower Belonging scores and lower engagement scores than students offered a one-to-one meeting ($p .001$), and lower scores than students who attended group PDT workshops ($p < .05$). Students who chose not to attend an offered PDT meeting ($n = 6$) also showed better Belonging and engagement scores than students who were not offered a PDT meeting ($p < .05$).

Belonging was rated higher in the one-to-one group than the timetabled group ($p .025$); there were no significant differences between group meetings and timetabled classes.

Failing to offer a **PDT meeting** was detrimental to student belonging in this first year cohort indicating that this is a vital component of the SAS retention strategy. Whilst one-to-one meetings were found to be better in relation to timetabled classes this didn't not replicate with other group formats and given the importance of forming connections with other students, and in creating a sense of self-reliance, the **group model should be retained but should be supplemented with one-to-one access and support**. It is notable that students who were offered a PDT meeting but made a decision not to attend, nonetheless showed stronger Belonging and Mattering scores than those who were not invited to a PDT meeting (*small number warrants a cautious interpretation*).

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Perceived Benefit of the PDT Meeting

Whether the students believed that the PDT meeting was useful to them was a significant influence on Belonging and mattering scales. Students who found the PDT meeting useful (64.7%) had significantly higher Belonging scores, $p < .001$ (*belongingness*, $p = .015$; *engagement*, $p < .001$; *self-confidence*, $p < .001$). They also reported significantly greater Mattering scores, $p = .001$ (*importance*, $p = .008$; *reliance*, $p = .056$).

Perceived Benefit of PDT meeting format

A univariate analysis of variance considered how the approach to PDT meetings and perceived value might impact measures of Belonging. Significant main effects of perceived value, $p = .008$, and meeting type, $p = .033$, were qualified by a significant interaction, $p = .01$. This effect accounted for around 14.5% of the variance in Belonging scores. A separate analysis found that Mattering scores are stronger if the meeting is perceived as useful but the method of meeting did not moderate this.

Mean Global belonging scores by perceived value of each PDT meeting format

	Useful		Neutral		Not useful	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
One to One	9.24	1.36	8.8	1.94	4.83	-
Group	9.06	1.12	8.02	0.89	8	0.47
Timetabled	8.69	1.29	7.07	2.63	8.27	1.11

Belonging scores remain strong even if the content of the group workshops is not perceived as useful. This suggests that the value of group workshops is aligned with creating community and supporting connection with the other students. It should be recognised that these classes required students to work together to learn how to navigate the university environment and resources. In contrast, belonging scores significantly lower if the one-to-one meetings were not perceived to be useful. It is important that the PDT meetings or workshops have been tailored to the needs of the given cohort and their progression within the academic cycle.