



**Pastoral support for UK Higher Education students in the context of Covid19 – A case study**

*Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science (M.Sc.) in Education, with a special emphasis on Higher Education.*

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## Abstract

This study explores the provision of pastoral support for students in the context of a lockdown, due to Covid19. As institutions have been focusing their efforts on redirecting teaching provision and assessments to online fora, there is a risk that adapting personal tutoring and pastoral support is comparatively less systematic. The mental health and wellbeing of students and staff have been prevalent issues in Higher Education. For students, pastoral support from their tutors, and other members of staff, can make a massive difference to their wellbeing and academic success. In the current context of Covid19, the crisis of student mental health and wellbeing has worsened.

This exploratory study examines the views and experiences of 17 students, 6 academic staff and 4 professional services staff regarding the provision of pastoral support at Manchester Metropolitan University, at this time. The study aims to do the following:

- explore the nature of pastoral support offered to students in the context of a lockdown;
- identify issues and challenges experienced by staff providing the support and students experiencing it;
- offer potential solutions.

The study incorporated the most appropriate qualitative data collection method at this time, online interviews, to gather the most in-depth experiences, to inform the study. The findings revealed that the demand on pastoral support services had increased, students had experienced a diverse range of issues and concerns, many of which were worsened by the pandemic. The effective use of technology and the proactive role played by staff was key in making pastoral support accessible for students.

The data analysis adopted the Miles and Huberman framework (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). From the analysis, the research identifies the following inter-linked categories being important factors in student satisfaction and wellbeing in the current climate. These are: academic and social integration, a sense of community, flexible and informal mechanisms of support, support regarding academic progress and employability prospects. The research also emphasized the importance of effective referrals, appropriate advice, goal-setting, feedback, motivation and closing the loop. The study considered students' experiences prior to lockdown and analysed their experiences thereafter, highlighting best practice regarding effective pastoral support. The research considers students' concerns for the future and makes many useful suggestions for enhancing pastoral support systems in the context of this new reality.

## Acknowledgements

This study is dedicated to all those in higher education who hope to overcome many challenges to achieve their dreams, goals and ambitions. Universities are fascinating places, with the power to transform lives. This study was born out of a desire to champion all that is good in universities; to see everyone, regardless of background and identity, have the opportunity to excel in their roles and fulfil their potential. To all of our enablers and those who inspire us to aim higher, I say thank you.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The crisis caused by COVID-19, and the global response to it, is an extraordinary situation which is fast-changing and unprecedented. It has affected every aspect of life, including the higher education sector which faces a particular set of challenges. The health and wellbeing of students and representation of their academic interests are at the top of the agenda for the sector. The disruption poses significant challenges to the student experience, to staff and their delivery of programmes and services.

As institutions grapple with the new reality, efforts have been made to adapt the provision of teaching and services. This includes digitisation of resources, live streaming of classes and making academic content easily accessible. This focus is understandable given that the primary purpose of universities is to educate. What has been visibly less systematic, is the adaptation of pastoral support in response to this new 'normal'. This is not to assume that it has not happened. Rather this exploratory study will shed light on how it has happened, and how it could be improved, using a post-92 institution as a case study.

The phrase 'pastoral support' is chosen because it allows flexibility as well as a focus for this study. The flexibility is welcomed because there are a range of stakeholders who are well-positioned to evaluate provision, due to the role they play in providing pastoral support or experiencing it. The researcher has interviewed students, academic and professional staff. The focal point of the study comes into play as the benefits of effective pastoral support on students' success and wellbeing are well documented (Dominguez-Whitehead, 2018; Grey and Osborne, 2018; Walsh et. all 2009) and this study will explore its importance in the context of a global pandemic.

The word pastoral is used in reference to 'the work of teachers and priests that involves giving help and advice about personal matters' (Cambridge Dictionary, accessed 20 June 2020.). In the context of the Education sector, the word is associated with caregiving and showing concern for students (Minott, 2010). The pastoral model of personal tutoring stems from the Oxbridge model, wherein traditionally, a specific tutor was assigned to each student to guide them through their studies and act as a 'moral tutor', providing guidance on academic as well as moral issues (Laycock 2009). The word 'pastoral' is often used interchangeably with the role of personal tutors as they provide academic and non-academic pastoral support for students, but the support can be provided by professional staff as well,

or the responsibilities can be shared. It is this understanding of the word 'pastoral' which is used throughout this study.

Covid19 has brought about unparalleled challenges to the student experience. The importance of effective pastoral support was paramount even before Covid19. Student Mind's researchers found that responding to students' mental health and wellbeing issues is a core part of the role of academic staff members, having interviewed 52 academics at five universities (Hughes et. all 2018). In the current circumstances, pastoral support is even more important, given the disruption to everyone's lives. Investigating the quality and nature of pastoral support systems is of great importance for anyone with an interest in higher education issues.

Over the last two decades, the increasing marketization of the Higher Education sector has made it a more competitive system. There is an ever-growing emphasis on measures of success such as student outcomes, student satisfaction and retention. Students who may experience a lack of support, academic or pastoral, may question the value of their degree in financial terms. The student intake for higher education in 2019, comprised of more than one-fifth of 18 year old students from parts of the country with the lowest rate of participation (Weale, 2019). The Universities Minister, Michelle Donelan, was critical of universities for focussing 'too much on getting students through the door, and not enough on how many drop out.' (Gov.uk 2020, accessed on 22 July 2020). Retention of students is one of the notable challenges arising from widening participation and improving access to higher education (Cameron et. all 2011).

Many studies have shown that student satisfaction, retention and success is linked with students' sense of belonging and engagement with their institution. Existing challenges in ensuring that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to succeed will be exacerbated by the current global health crisis. The limitations on socialising, interacting, especially outside one's usual circles will affect confidence (Wooley and Ebdon 2020). The lack of a feeling of belonging will be worsened as much of the student experience may be remote, online or blended. There is an ever growing requirement of a pastoral support system which maximises achievement, improves satisfaction and minimises attrition (Thomas 2006). Pastoral support systems will be increasingly important in this complex environment.

## **1.1 Research rationale and context**

Originally this study was going to focus on the experiences of academic staff in providing personal tutoring, as there is a gap in the literature about their experiences. As the research continued, the impact of Covid19 placed greater importance on exploring students' experiences of receiving pastoral support. It was recognised that pastoral support often goes beyond what is offered by a personal tutor and is provided by a range of individuals in different teams and areas. It was important to look at support mechanisms holistically and not exclude these players.

An expansion of student numbers in Higher Education, coupled with the marketization and increasing competition in the sector, has led to a greater focus on 'value for money' for students. This has been demonstrated by rising demands being placed on academic and student support services (Caleb, 2014). Students' expectations of non-academic pastoral support has increased, as more students from non-traditional backgrounds are accessing Higher Education, who have different needs and expectations. Coinciding with all of these developments, mental health issues and associated challenges in resolving these have understandably become a hot topic in the education sector. There is a general consensus in the sector that more needs to be done to address these issues (Coughlan, 2019; Bhardwa, 2018; Wakeford, 2017).

The Covid19 crisis and its aftermath will fundamentally change institutions. Universities seek to provide students with an education that goes beyond the curriculum, 'educating the whole student, not just their heads' (Seldon, 2020: 2). A higher education is more than a graduate's earning potential (Buckingham, 2020). The civic role of a university in contributing to the community has become more important than ever. Universities have a key role in creating a learning environment where staff and students have the opportunity to thrive and overcome adversities. In this environment, the pastoral element is crucial.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) highlighted that the economic decline of the pandemic 'will affect people's health in the short and the longer term' (Blundell et. all, 2020: 5). 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year in England (mind.org.uk, accessed 20 June 2020). There has been a surge in cases of anxiety, stress, loneliness, mental breakdowns and depression experienced by higher education students (Shackle, 2019). It must be emphasized that wellbeing is not just clinical and there are a number of possible interventions which can prevent it from reaching that stage.

The pandemic has worsened financial inequality which is linked with poor mental health (mentalhealth.org.uk, accessed 21 June 2020). There have been budget cuts to social work, youth services, the NHS and state schools over the last decade and universities can be

viewed as a reflection of how society operates (Shackle 2009). Alongside this, the cost of university education has risen, and therefore student's rights as consumers are protected (Competition and Markets Authority, 2015) and there are higher expectations. Whether market-driven or morally imperative, investing and improving pastoral support systems for students is essential if universities are to provide an all-round higher education experience.

## **1.2 The Researcher's experiences**

The aims of the study are informed by years of experiences that the researcher has spent in various roles in higher education. They have worked in an elected role as the student body President at the University of Salford Students' Union (2012-2014). They have worked as a student reviewer for the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). They have represented students as a delegate in the local community as well as in the National Union of Students (NUS) National Conferences (2011-2015). Recently, they were appointed a Student Trustee at the Oxford University Student Union. Currently, they are working as a professional in the Curriculum Services team at the Manchester Metropolitan University. Throughout this experience, they have advocated collaboration between staff and students and promoted inclusive, intellectually stimulating learning environments.

The researcher has had a first-hand experience of how pastoral support can transform students' experiences. Their own experience was transformed when they were proactively supported by their personal tutor to go on to do a placement with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). This was a turning point as it was the start of their journey which turned them from a shy, reserved international student to a confident student leader.

Throughout the study, the researcher has sought to think critically about their own assumptions of meaningful support and the issues and challenges experienced by staff and students. The study is lead entirely by the evidence presented to the researcher by the participants. It is hoped that the study provides an avenue for a more informed discourse and critical discussions within the sector about genuinely improving support systems for students from all backgrounds, to empower them to succeed.

## **1.3 Research aims and questions**

The aim of this study to raise awareness of the importance of pastoral support for higher education students in the current climate. This study is exploratory in nature and it aims to address the following research questions in the context of one university. These are:

1. What has been students' experience of using pastoral support systems?

- a. What was the experience pre-Covid19?
  - b. What was experience during the lockdown?
2. What are the key issues and concerns for students in this current climate? How can the university's pastoral support system address some of them?
  3. What have been the barriers or challenges for pastoral support to be effective (for staff and students)?
  4. How can the university's pastoral support system be improved in the current context?

## **1.4 Thesis outline**

There are a total of six chapters, including the introduction which sets the scene, introduces the topic and the research questions. The second chapter provides a detailed review of the literature regarding pastoral support and personal tutoring. The review considers the emergence of pastoral support as a key issue in higher education, explores models of pastoral support and the personal tutoring role. It discusses the key debates regarding the provision of pastoral support, including the benefits of an effective system on the student experience. Finally, the chapter highlights gaps in the research and demonstrates how the study adds to the body of existing literature.

Following the above is the third chapter regarding an explanation of the methodology adopted in the study. The approach comprises of qualitative, semi-structured online interviews as the data collection tool; the Miles and Huberman framework (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013) selected for data analysis, which involved a process of coding. The end of the chapter discusses the limitations of these approaches, challenges encountered and steps taken by the researcher to mitigate the impact of these.

The findings, analysis and discussions chapter is divided in two parts. Firstly, students' past experiences of pastoral support needed to be acknowledged and discussed. There are questions to be asked about how the identified best practice, continues in the current climate. Moreover, students' past experiences influence their present and are linked with their expectations of the future. Therefore, throughout the second part of this chapter, which examines students' experiences during the Covid19 lockdown period, suggestions are made for enhancement of the system. This chapter ends with an inclusion of the experiences of academic and professional services staff, highlighting some of the challenges identified in the literature and reinforcing the point that pastoral support comes from a range of places and hence must be considered holistically.

Finally, the concluding chapter summarises the study, identifies the limitations and provides recommendations and ideas for future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter will provide an overview of the available and relevant literature regarding pastoral support provided by personal tutors and pastoral support models in higher education. There is a wide variety of research papers, books, websites and other literature available on the topic. Therefore the focus will be on presenting scholars' views of the fundamentals of pastoral support, which will provide a conceptual framework for the study. The following five topics have been established in line with the research questions and the purpose of the study.

The first section will introduce pastoral support in Higher Education, the second section will explore the role of personal tutors and pastoral support models, the third section will focus on the key elements of effective pastoral support. The fourth section will focus on ideas for enhancing pastoral support systems in the current climate. The final section will outline the gaps and the limitations of research within the literature.

### 2.2 Pastoral support in UK Higher Education

Universities operate in an environment of policy guidance (Universities UK 2016). The Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) emphasised the importance of an effective personal tutoring system, in the context of an increasingly diverse makeup of students and rising student numbers, as far back as 1994 (HEQC, 1994). The National Union of Students (NUS) emphasised that personal tutoring is regarded by many students as a 'vital lifeline to their academic progress' in the Charter on Personal Tutors (NUS, 2011). A number of policy drivers have placed importance on widening participation and improving access to higher education, such as the Higher Education Opportunity Act 2008 and recently the Office for Students (OfS, 2018). There is a recognition in the sector that Universities need to be accessible and inclusive.

As Higher Education has become more accessible, students with different needs, expectations and experiences (McIntosh and Grey, 2017) are placing a greater emphasis on institutional support mechanisms. This is against the backdrop of increasing competition and marketisation of Higher Education, especially since the trebling of tuition fees in 2010. Students are not just learners but they are consumers who have invested in their University experience (Universities UK 2017; Kandiko and Mawer 2013;) and therefore have increasingly higher expectations. There is an increasing emphasis on metrics of institutional success such as the National Student Survey and the Graduate Outcomes Survey, which

are used to determine the quality of institutions (Beech 2017). The importance of providing effective support is additionally heightened by the creation of the Office for Students (Gov.uk 2018), a sector 'Watchdog' which has powers over Higher Education. The OfS regulatory framework was established through the Higher Education Act (2017), which also created the Teaching Excellence Framework, with a focus on metrics to assess student satisfaction, retention and employability.

Effective pastoral support is seen as key to both student and University success, promoting retention, progression and performance (Warne and McAndrew 2008; The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2014). Pastoral support can come from many sources, such as Student Services, Wellbeing teams, Careers, Faculty Support teams. However, students in most institutions are allocated a personal tutor, whose role is the focal point of support (Laycock. 2009). From much of the literature (Gutteridge 2001; Durkin and Main 2002; HEFCE 2006), personal tutoring is viewed as the 'answer' to a myriad of key higher education issues such as progression, employability, attainment and differential outcomes. There is a lack of consensus regarding the purpose of personal tutoring, therefore the issues need to be separated from one another, in order to be evaluated effectively.

### **2.3 Pastoral support models**

In previous literature (Morley 1998), the status of personal tutoring was noted to be considered less important compared with other high status activities such as research and teaching. In recent literature, much of the workload of academic personal tutors is addressed by the professional model of pastoral support, in which there are dedicated staff who serve to bridge the relationship between personal tutors and specialist student services (Marr and Aynsley-Smith 2006). One way of looking at pastoral support systems are the following three models: the pastoral model, which is based on the Oxbridge model of a 'moral tutor', a concept in use since the 16th century; the professional model, in which all students are referred to professionals or specialists, such as counsellors, wellbeing officers, housing officers, finance advisors, careers advisers, etc; and the curriculum model, in which pastoral support is embedded in the programme of study, such as through personal development plans, allocation of personal tutors (Earwalker, 1992).

Another way to describe approaches to pastoral support is how duties are divided up according to the objectives of the institution. For clarity, these are: approach A, when pastoral and academic duties are joined up to provide holistic support; approach B, when pastoral and academic are split up and approach C, incorporating the mentoring and

coaching models, wherein support is available via a personal tutor as well as through other dedicated teams (Wootton, 2007). The third approach has become more prevalent in recent years in order for institutions to focus on learner's outcomes, such as their progression, performance and retention. What has also coincided with the adoption of this approach are new job titles, such as Learning Coach, Mentor, Progress Tutor, Achievement Tutor or Pastoral support tutor (Wootton, 2007). There is a lack of debate in the literature about which models are the most appropriate, what the ideal balance between academic and professional services should be and what are the merits of each type of system.

There seems to be a consensus regarding the notion that the academic tutor must retain a level of pastoral duty, even if there is overlap with other services. It may be due to the notion that personal tutoring is a unique feature of the UK Higher Education system (Attwood, 2009). From anecdotal experience, the Oxbridge tutorial system which enables personalised learning, reflection and feedback, is considered a heritage which has influenced practice in the rest of the Higher Education sector. The equivalent of the personal tutor role in the US is the academic advisor. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education in the US, has set a national framework for the role (Shaffer, 2015). There is no equivalent national standard for higher education in the UK. At the Further Education level in the UK, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service have developed a National Occupational Standard for the personal tutoring role, but this is not used in higher education (Grey and Osborne, 2018). The researcher's view is that there may be merits in having standardised expectations of pastoral roles and duties, so long as these are not imposed, for institutional autonomy is one of the strengths of the UK higher education system.

The pastoral element of student support has been emphasized even outside of Higher Education, for example, in Teachers' Education. The Norms and Standards for Educators recognises seven roles of a competent and qualified teacher, one of which is having a 'well-defined community, citizenship and pastoral' role, which is described as being 'supportive, responsive, empowering and change-oriented task of engagement' (The Norms and Standards for Educators, 2000: 4; ELRC, 2004:47). The pastoral role has also been described as a 'values education' (Beck and Earl 2001, 65) and instrumental in fostering a community comprising of 'three Rs: relationships, respect and responsibility' (Grove 2004). Teacher education institutions have embedded in their training that, in addition to having mastery over a subject and developing the quality of teaching, their role is to 'encompass learners' psychosocial needs' (Schoeman, 2012: 328). The relevance here is that lessons can be learned from teachers' training to improve higher education pastoral support

providers. The process of learning involves an individual as a 'whole', and is realised through relationships with others (Williamson, 1998: 192).

## **2.4 The personal tutoring role**

Personal tutors wear many hats to fulfil a number of multifaceted roles and responsibilities for students (Gidman et. all 2000; Por and Barriball 2008), such as, providing information about institutional processes and expectations; academic support; welfare support; referral to further information and other areas of support; a relationship with the University and a sense of community (Thomas 2006). The role has been described as 'all-encompassing' (Stuart et. all 2019), as an 'anchor' or a reliable point of contact between the student and the institution (Quinn 1995). The majority of studies exploring the provision of institutional pastoral support have focussed on what personal tutors should do (Walsh 2009; Stephen et. all, 2008; Stuart et. all, 2018) rather than establishing the purpose of a pastoral support system or evaluating it (Prowse et. all 2020). In addition to providing academic and pastoral support, personal tutors act as a gateway to other types of general and specialist support (Wooton, 2013). It is the aim of this exploratory study that the provision of pastoral support is considered holistically in a Covid19 world, to examine the range of available support and understand what works from the student perspective.

It is understandable why personal tutors are the focal point of studies evaluating pastoral support. When students are asked about who they are most likely to approach for help or advice, they are most likely to go to their personal tutor (Riddel and Bates, 2010).

Interestingly, students are more likely to approach their personal tutors than they were to access the University Counselling service for psychological issues (Hughes, 2018). It is clear in the literature that personal tutors play a predominant role in providing pastoral support and influencing the lives of tutees. It has been acknowledged as a challenging role (Mcfarlane 2016). Most of the published books on the subject are pitched towards providing personal tutors with the skills and knowledge to excel in their roles (Stork et. all 2015; Lochtie 2018; Wisker 2008). Personal tutors need to demonstrate empathy, genuineness and understanding (Yale, 2017). The impact of undertaking this multifaceted role should not be underestimated as it requires an emotional investment (Luck 2010).

The concept of pastoral support is not new, however, it is considered poorly defined (Gidman et. all 2011; Braine and Parnell 2011). There is no single definition of a personal tutor role (Mynott 2016), but generally it is understood to an academic staff member who provide holistic advice and guidance regarding academic and pastoral matters. In many

studies, students mentioned that they were unsure of the roles and responsibilities of personal tutors, and that there was a lack of clarity on who to approach with personal issues (Myers, 2013; Price et. all 2014; Hall et. all 2008). It has been stressed that there needs to be greater clarity regarding where and how pastoral support is provided. This includes clarifying the roles and responsibilities of personal tutors as a key provider of pastoral support but also other support mechanisms in a University, which enable students to optimise their educational experience (Ghengesh, 2016). If there is a trusting and supportive environment, students will feel more comfortable to be able to talk about personal and academic issues (Dobinson-Harrington 2006). Staff who are seen as supportive, approachable and accessible can make a positive contribution to students' academic development (The QAA, 2014). Pastoral support can be therapeutic in nature, enabling students to express their emotions safely and authentically (Warne and McAndrew 2008).

A study showed that the majority of academic tutors in an institution believed that there were problems with the practice and delivery of pastoral support systems (Price et. all 2014). These tutors unanimously held the view that meetings with students should not be compulsory. There is often a debate about whether academic tutors should deal with students' personal issues or whether their support should be limited purely to academic matters. Some tutors feel that they are being asked to be 'counsellors' (Price et. all 2014), which, in a marketised higher education sector, can be seen as a controversial idea. The busy schedules of tutors, compounded by the pressure to produce high quality research and teaching, leaves less time for pastoral duties. The impact of this is insufficient interest and a lack of empathy in meetings with students (Dobinson-Harrington 2006). The 'buy in' from tutors is of paramount importance for the system to be effective (Price et. all 2014). A flexible pastoral support system, one that does not adopt a 'one size fits all' approach but caters to the diverse needs of students, has been emphasised (Sosabowski et al. 2003). Students are not a homogenous group and so pastoral support should be tailored to the university, programme and individual student's requirement (Atkinson 2014). The different models of pastoral support, wherein pastoral duties are shared, play an important role in addressing some of these issues.

Studies have highlighted that personal tutors should possess certain characteristics to provide effective pastoral support. This includes, showing supportiveness (Stephen et al. 2008), helpfulness (Sosabowski et al. 2003), empathy, friendliness (Ross et al. 2014), being non-judgemental and caring, being good listeners (Gubby and McNab 2014), possessing trustfulness (Dobinson-Harrington 2006), being approachable and being 'genuinely interested' in students (Ross et al. 2014). Those who provide pastoral support must be

shown to possess these qualities or a willingness to develop the required skills (Dobinson-Harrington 2006). Poor pastoral support can have a negative impact on students, and in extreme cases, it can be affect learners' mental and physical well-being (Wooton, 2007).

Students highlight the need for personal tutors to strike a balance between academic advice and support and pastoral support and encouragement (Hall et. all, 2008). This balance is essential, however, it is often tilted towards academic support only. It has been widely acknowledged in the literature that personal tutors should be proactive rather than passive in their interactions (Varney 2013) and they should take the lead in reaching out to students. Students value this and also appreciate the developmental opportunity that comes with conversations about progress, grades and monitoring of engagement or attendance (Robbins, 2012). A pastoral support model in which staff are required to make regular contact with students has been advocated by a few writers (Attwood, 2009; Hall et. all 2008). The number of meetings regarding pastoral support has been linked to students' perceptions of supportiveness and belonging (Miller, 2016). Interestingly, open-door policies have not been found to appeal to students who would not see the benefit of attending pastoral meetings (Neville 2007).

## **2.5 Pastoral support and the student experience**

The transition into Higher Education, getting accustomed to a new learning environment and settling in at university are noted to be key challenges for students (Morgan 2013). There is a higher level of stress during first year (Brinkworth et al. 2009). A positive relationship with a personal tutor was found to contribute to a sense of belonging and acted as a 'buffer' against some of the challenges experienced during first year (Watts 2011). There have been many studies highlighting the importance of the first year experience in sharpening retention, progression and withdrawal decisions (Blythman and Orr 2003; Fitzgibbon and Prior, 2003). One study showed that experiencing poor personal tutoring was worse than not having a personal tutor at all, as it can lead students to question their decision to go to university and associate their higher education experience with negative emotions. (Yale 2017). Personal tutors can play a key role in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the first-year experience, through academic and social integration (Hartwell and Farbrother, 2006).

In a critical debate about pastoral support, it was suggested that the massification of Higher Education has had a detrimental impact on personal tutoring relationships (Stephen et. all 2008). Pastoral support systems can help to build 'cultural capital', which in this context, are social assets (such as behaviour, style of speech, education intellect), which promote social

mobility, known to be possessed and valued by the 'educated elite' (Blythman et al. (2006: 107). Students arrive at University from different socio-economic backgrounds and hence possess different amounts of cultural capital. For students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, there are a particular set of structural and cultural barriers. One way of addressing the deficit in cultural capital is through the provision of effective pastoral support (Laycock 2009) wherein developmental conversations can be had in a safe environment.

One of the challenges arising from the widening participation and internationalisation agenda is the retention of students on University courses (Cameron et al. 2011). This not only affects student success but also has financial implications for students as well as universities. As student numbers have increased, the student body has become more diverse and student/staff ratios have been negatively impacted. Many studies have linked effective pastoral support with student retention (NAO, 2007). A study involving, 9000 students in the UK found that the quality of meetings with personal tutors were found to be a key factor in their decision to continue their studies or leave higher education (Martinez and Munday, 1998). The students who left their programme reported dissatisfaction with the way tutorials were run, a lack of collegiality and a lack of effort to create a positive and engaging environment, as well as a lack of communication from tutors.

Much of the literature on retention focuses on issues experienced by students which affect their ability to continue their studies (Thomas 2006). The key factors which are found to affect student retention are: academic preparedness, academic experience, commitment to the institution, relationships, academic and social integration, socio-economic factors, financial issues (Laycock 2009). Many of these issues can be addressed by an effective pastoral support system. In contrast there are few studies exploring the positive influences on student retention, and one of these places great importance on accessible pastoral support (Walsh et. all, 2009). An effective pastoral support system can enhance the student experience, improve retention (Web et. all 2017; MacFarlane 2016), progression and timely completion (Smith 2008) by fostering an academic community which enables students to contextualise their learning experiences (Leach and Wang, 2015) and feel motivated in their student journey.

As universities are reviewing their income revenue streams and questioning their dependency on income from international students, it must be highlighted that diversity extends beyond international student recruitment. With regards to 'home' students, the diversity relates to socio-economic backgrounds, previous experience of further or higher education such students with vocational and technical qualifications which are different from

the traditional academic routes. It is therefore important to stress that support mechanisms underpinning curriculum delivery must continue to evolve and adapt at the forefront, rather than as an afterthought.

## **2.6 Enhancing pastoral support systems**

The personal tutor system has been under pressure for some time (Laycock, 2009), as highlighted in sections above. When it comes to staff who provide pastoral care to students, they need to understand their responsibilities and the boundaries which define their roles. The linkages between a University's central support systems and personal tutors need to be developed and clarified. The core responsibilities of a personal tutor may include, acting as a sound board for students' issues, providing students with advice on attendance, assessment and academic performance, helping with students' personal development plans, discussing progress and providing feedback (Riddle and Bates, 2010; Ross et.al 2014). When it is appropriate to do so, personal tutors will sign-post students to specialist support services, as the tutors may not be the best placed advise on some issues. The University's central services play a vital role in addressing students' specialised needs, whether this be wellbeing, counselling, special learning needs, or support with careers (Grant 2006). It is therefore important for these services to be aware of each other and coordinate with each other. A lack of connectivity between these services will not only be a missed opportunity but may have a detrimental impact on the students' experience (Price et. all 2014).

Typically when students are allocated personal tutors, they can expect regular meetings, opportunity for discussion and feedback. Insufficient contact time with personal tutors or lack of meetings is a common issue affecting the personal tutoring system, and various institutional studies have shed light on this (Sosabowski, et. all 2003; Guby and McNab, 2014). Some students have blamed the tutors for not being proactive in reaching out, similarly some tutors shared the view that students should take responsibility and initiative in making and attending appointments (Owen, 2002). For the system to work, both parties are required to make an equal effort to arrange meetings on a regular basis, and invest the energy to engage with each other (Basset et. all 2014). There has been relatively less emphasis in the literature regarding the need for students' taking initiative to seek support. Interviews with tutors showed that many believed that the success of pastoral support systems relies on improving students' awareness of the benefits and their perception of its value (Price et. all 2014).

Studies suggesting enhancements to pastoral support systems primarily focus on the provision of personal tutoring and emphasize on resources, awareness-raising, communication, clarity of roles and the importance of a framework within which the role can operate (Laycock, 2009). There is evidence to suggest that if the role is regarded as a 'tickboxing exercise', students sense this and report dissatisfaction (Dhillon 2008). The approach to pastoral support should be regarded as a continuous process that lasts the student's journey in higher education rather than disconnected events.

## **2.7 Pastoral support on online and distance education**

As many Universities are embracing online methods of teaching or a blended form of teaching which incorporates online interactions, virtual meetings have been found to be easy to organise. The literature is mixed regarding virtual versus physical meetings. Online meetings have been found to be as valuable as physical meetings (Arnold et. all 1998) but should not replace them (Robbins 2012). Face-to-face interactions regarding pastoral support are regarded as the 'gold standard' by students (Kandiko and Kinchin 2013; Myers 2008: 21). It is a paradox that even though the use of technology has increased in higher education, students still value and prefer the 'distinctly human' interactions (Jordan, 2016: 25).

As this study has explored pastoral support in an institution in the context of a global pandemic, there were no equivalent scenarios in the literature to compare, contrast and consider. The most relevant studies in this regard are those which have evaluated pastoral support on online, distance learning, blended and flexible modes of study. There are few studies which fall in this category and most of them relate to the provision at the Open University (Jones et. all 2018; Simpson 2013; Stevenson et. all 1996). The Open University has provided flexible learning opportunities to students for 50 years and it succeeds in many of the attributes of flexible learning that students value. One of their activities which was considered best practice, was the introduction of an institutional framework for the interaction of support teams and academic tutors, with the aim of aligning pastoral support with the curriculum (Hilliam and Williams, 2018). This ensured that students received more personalised support, which was routed in specialist discipline knowledge.

Much of the research on conceptions of academic support is based on face-to-face, on campus studying experience. It is widely assumed in these environments, that academic tutoring and personal tutoring are distinct roles. Therefore, studies about on campus academic support often omit the consideration of pastoral support (Postareff et. all 2008; Carnell, 2007), while research about personal tutoring regards academic support as the

most significant element (Wheeler and Birtle, 1993). Many students on online or flexible learning programmes expect that both the academic and pastoral duties are packaged together in tutorial support, but most studies do not consider the pastoral element in online modes of study (Jordan 2016). The limited amount of research on distance and online education is focussed on the delivery of course content . However, some lessons can be learned from programmes that operate in blended delivery patterns, which make use of emails, telephone and conference calls, which have been found to improve student satisfaction and student success (Gonzalez, 2009). There are common aspects between campus-based remote delivery and distance education, therefore best practice regarding the use of technology should be shared more widely to improve pastoral support systems.

One study found that students who choose online or flexible modes of study come with varied expectations regarding the quality of support they would receive from their tutors (Sander et. all 2006). It suggested that expectation setting regarding support processes prior to the start of the study would improve student satisfaction, retention and outcomes (Sander et. all 2006). When it comes to online or flexible modes of study, tailored support is a critical element for students' success (Smith and Wade, 1994). These student appreciate being reassured about their programme and learning plans, described as 'psychological support' that they are 'learning the right thing' (Clark 1994: 47). This type of specialised support needs to be personalised to the needs of the students at the appropriate points of the student lifecycle to ensure academic success and wellbeing.

A study compared the experiences of students on a programme of study who received tutorial support conventionally (using one to one meetings) with online tutorial support, found that students receiving online tutorial support had a poorer experience than those who had received it in person (Jelfs et. all, 2007). The study established that tutorial support was seen by students as not just an academic exercise but a highly valued pastoral support mechanism. It was recommended that both tutors and students need training to communicate online to overcome the absence of 'paralinguistic cues' (Jelfs et. all, 2007:10). Staff development training in many universities tend to focus on the technical factors of online delivery rather than the pedagogical considerations of virtual interactions. (Price et. all, 2007).

## **2.8 Limitations in literature research findings**

Given the importance of pastoral support for students and universities, it was surprising to note that there is limited research on the models of pastoral support and their effectiveness,

and very few studies capturing the views of personal tutors themselves (Grey and Osborne 2018). This is often attributed to the lack of time and resources by those undertaking the study (Miller 2016). The scarcity of research on students' expectations and experiences of pastoral support has been mentioned in a previous study (Hixenbaugh et. all 2006).

A number of studies emphasize the importance of integrating in the academic and social structures of the institution as being an integral part of students' successful outcomes (Richardson, 2000). Students have to 'manoeuvre' through a number of cultures to succeed (Street, 2000, 6). Personal tutors play the role of 'mentor, exemplar, motivator and counsellor' (Jelfs et. all 2007:46). They play a vital enabling role in 'embedding students', promoting academic success through 'educational socialisation' (Thomas 2006: 21; Haggis 2004, 340). It is a glaring question that Universities are in the process of answering - how should pastoral support be replicated and adapted in a Covid19 world. Much of the dated research on personal tutoring is action research, which aims to improve practice at specific universities, rather than create new knowledge (Elliot 1999).

It is also not well-documented, what challenges and issues academic staff members experience whilst carrying out their pastoral duties, in the context of an ever-changing sector. The last study which examined some of the issues from staff members' perspectives was undertaken by the Higher Education Academy in 2008. There seems to be a gap in recent literature highlighting the experiences of individuals carrying out this role. It is pertinent that this is addressed, as recent reports have shown that there is a rapid increase in academic staff members succumbing to mental health problems and being referred to counselling services (O'Brien and Guiney, 2019). This has been described as a 'mental health epidemic' (Morrish, 2019). Indeed, there is an increase in both students and staff members admitting to experiencing mental health problems (Gorczynski, 2016); and for various reasons, the latter group seems to be less focused on. This study intends to add to the existing research about pastoral support by focusing on the experiences of both students and professional and academic staff members, in the context of Covid19. This is the only known study on pastoral support in higher education considering the impact of the pandemic, conducted during Covid19. It is important that more studies are carried out on the topic and some suggestions have been made in the concluding chapter.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter discusses the research procedures applied in conducting this study along with the various considerations underlying the research design and method. The first few sections present the research design, including participant selection, data collection, data analysis and ensuring quality and rigour. The remaining sections reflect on ethical issues, the researcher's positionality, the limitations of the research instruments employed this study and steps taken to address these.

### 3.1 Research design

The research employed a case study to examine the effectiveness of pastoral support available to students, in a post-1992 University, in the context of Covid19. The support includes programme level support, provided by personal tutors; institutional, that is University-wide support and guidance from central services, and also, localised academic and personal support provided by Faculties and Departments. Effective research design serves as a bridge connecting the research questions with the data (Punch 2013).

A case study approach was adopted as it can allow for a more rounded, holistic study than other research designs (Hakim 2000). It enables the researcher to study an aspect of a problem in some depth within a limited time scale (Bell 1999). This is because case studies can provide context to better understand issues and reveal various interactive processes at work within organisations or institutions which may not be acknowledged in large scale surveys.

This study was born out of a concern for exploring students' experience and perception of the support available to them after national lockdown was announced in the UK. The second part of the study explored staff's experiences of providing support. The key questions were focussed on students' knowledge and awareness of support systems available to them; how these were transformed in a Covid19 world; and how it impacted their experience. Both parts of the study explored the use of student support systems, the issues and challenges experienced in a Covid19 world and the participants' views for how the pastoral support system could be improved. The qualitative study is an open-ended, exploratory case study that utilizes semi-structured interviews with academic and professional staff and students. The exploratory design of the study enables research undertaken 'in order to determine the nature of the problem, exploratory research is not intended to provide conclusive evidence, but helps us to have a better understanding of the problem.' (Saunders et al., 2007: 134).

The research design selected as the most appropriate was in-depth qualitative interviewing. One of the benefits was the flexibility, as it allows for the exploration of issues and investigation of emerging themes (Maxwell, 2013). In addition, the qualitative data gathered by interview is rich in detail and enables the researcher to organise the information in an analysis which the reader would find useful and insightful (Creswell, 2013). Although the breadth of information was welcomed in the project, it must be balanced with structure to ensure a consistent coverage of topics in the interviews (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002) and also to prompt the interviewee to share relevant details from their experiences of providing or receiving pastoral support.

Semi-structured interviews impose fewer constraints on the researcher and the respondents, compared with survey questionnaires and structured interviews (Robson and McCartan, 2016). The flexibility in the format allows room for spontaneity and clarity in the interviews, which enabled the exploration of topics, such as the interaction of institutional and departmental systems of support and views about the quality and effectiveness of support. An elaborate description of the data collection process is provided in Data Collection. The qualitative research data was analysed using the Miles and Huberman framework (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013), which is discussed in Data Analysis.

### **3.2 Research participants**

Participants were purposively selected for the study. As the researcher is an employee of the institution considered in the case study, they were able to draw upon their network of personal and professional contacts to generate a list of prospective participants. A list of individuals was generated, based on two criteria: firstly, that they were a member of the institution and secondly, that they either had some involvement in pastoral support either as receivers of pastoral support or in designing or delivering pastoral support. The initial list comprised of 75 individuals. These were 35 academic staff members, 20 professional services staff (including Students' Union staff) and 30 students (including three student officers). Out of these individuals, a total of 27 were interviewed successfully. This comprised of 17 students, 6 academic staff members and 4 professional services staff. Out of the pool invited, there were four cancellations, and three were deemed unsuitable as they did not have a significant role in the pastoral support system within the institution, and therefore were not able to comment. Out of the 17 student participants, 11 were student representatives on the programme.

Due to Covid19, the options to reach participants were digital, predominantly via email, text or phone call. The researcher was prepared for a low response rate to invitations, but was still ambitious in their approach and reached out to as many individuals they could. The researcher was also prepared, that if participation from one group of individuals was significantly greater than other groups, the emerging themes and conclusions would have been different. In this case, the predominant group was students as the recipients of pastoral support, which worked in favour of the purpose of the study.

The number of individuals interviewed is consistent with other similar studies conducted in normal circumstances. More importantly, the views and in-depth experiences gathered, fulfilled the aim of this exploratory study. As qualitative research method enables in-depth understanding and exploration of issues by creating a close association with the respondents; a smaller sample size, typically around 20 is claimed to be ideal for qualitative interviews based research (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006).

Table 1 shows the subject areas of the student participants. In the case of academic and professional services staff, their department/teams have been mentioned. To protect identities, demographic data (such as age and ethnicity) was not recorded. Participants came from a range of backgrounds. It was coincidental that every student participant came from a different programme of study. The diversity and variety of views and experiences were apparent in the feedback provided.

**Table 1a: Profile of student participants**

Student	Gender (M/F)	Programme	Level	Number of years in higher education
S1	M	Business and Law Foundation programme	3	10 months
S2	M	BA Business Management	5	2
S3	F	BA Tourism Management	4	2
S4	F	BA International Business Management	6	3
S5	M	BA Sports Marketing Management	6	3
S6	F	BA Economics	6	3
S7	M	BSc Economics	6	4
S8	F	BA International Relations	5	2
S9	F	BA Sociology,	6	3
S10	M	BSc Geography	5	2
S11	M	Master of Sport Directorship	7, part time, year 2	4
S12	M	MSc Business Analytics	7	4
S13	F	MSc International Events Management	7	5
S14	F	MA Higher Education	7, part-time, year 2	5
S15	F	MPH Global Public Health	7	4
S16	F	Engineering	PhD, year 3	8
S17	M	English	PhD, year 2	6

Participants from the list below will be referred to as S1, S2, S3 and so on.

**Table 1b: Profile of academic staff**

Academic	Gender (M/F)	Department/Subject Area
A1	F	Economics, Policy and International Business
A2	F	People and Performance
A3	F	Politics and Public Services
A4	F	Psychology
A5	M	Sport and Exercise Sciences
A6	M	Leadership and Management

Participants from the list below will be referred to as A1, A2, A3 and so on.

**Table 1c: Profile of professional staff**

Professional	Gender (M/F)	Department/Subject Area
P1	F	University Teaching Academy
P2	F	Wellbeing Team
P3	F	Careers and Employability Service
P4	F	Students' Union

Participant from the list below will be referred to as P1, P2, P3 and so on.

### 3.3 Data collection

As the research questions focussed on subjective ideas and personal experiences, semi-structured interviews were selected as the most appropriate data collection tool (Flick, 2009). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to truly understand the participants' views about the subject matter, by providing an opportunity to ask follow up questions based on their reflection on the participant's thoughts throughout the interview (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

As the government forbade all face-to-face interaction due to Covid19, the majority of the interviews (23) were conducted over Skype video calls and 4 were conducted over the phone. The researcher conducted the interviews, based on an interview schedule created in the preparation stage (Appendix B). The interview schedule served as a 'a checklist of topics to be covered' (Robson & McCartan, 2016:285). However, the wording, sequence and time allocation for the questions were subject to change, depending on the situations in the interviews. The schedule allowed for flexibility to explore relevant issues as they emerged (Singleton & Straits, 2010) The sequence of questions asked, the wording, and the time allocated to each question were subject to change according to the situations in the interviews.

The subjective views of students regarding the pastoral support system in the context of Covid19, was crucial to answering the proposed research questions. It was important to consider how to develop a relationship with the participant when conducting interviews (James and Busher, 2012), so that they feel at ease, discussing their views honestly and openly. This development of a rapport is especially important in an online interviews, as there can be a perception of distance between the researcher and the participant (Orgad, 2005). There is also a reduced ability to interpret social queues and body language. The live video function of Skype, helped address this. The reduction in the quality of interviews were particularly apparent in the four telephone interviews, which were considerably shorter in duration.

Almost all of the participants were known to the researcher beforehand, some of these were through professional relationships developed over the years. These offline relationships are crucial in determining authenticity in online interactions (Xie, 2007). It was noted that the trust that comes with preexisting relationships allowed the participants to be honest and truly reflective about their thoughts and experience regarding the pastoral support system.

The researcher did a pilot online interview with a personal contact. This provided an opportunity to refine the questions, and add appropriate follow-up prompts, so they are an effective tool in collecting the data necessary to answer the research questions in the study. Each participant was invited to the interview via email, was provided the Participation Information Sheet (See appendix C) and had the opportunity ask any questions or clarifications. If willing to take part, they were emailed the Interview Schedule and a Participant Consent Form to sign and email back. The Skype interviews lasted approximately an hour and were video recorded on Skype. The telephone interviews took approximately half an hour. They were transcribed into written notes which were typed up afterwards to assist with the data analysis process.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

The recordings from Skype interviews and the notes taken from the telephonic interviews were typed up and analysed using the Miles and Huberman framework for qualitative data analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). There are three parts to this process, data condensation, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions (see figure 1).

In the field of qualitative research, coding is a way to define and organise data so it can be analysed for the purpose of a study (Gibbs, 2007). Coding is a process of identifying a passage in the text or other data items, searching and identifying concepts and finding relations between them. Data condensation is to allocate codes as prompts or triggers for deeper reflection on the meaning of the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). A key part of answering the research questions is to make use of opportunities for deep reflection and analysis by combing and coding the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

The researcher developed a provisional list of codes based on the literature, prior to conducting the interviews. As the research progressed, this list was modified as an inductive coding process was adopted. After each interview was transcribed, the researcher conducted the first cycle of coding by assigning text with the relevant codes from the list of priori codes, which helped identify the major themes in the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013).

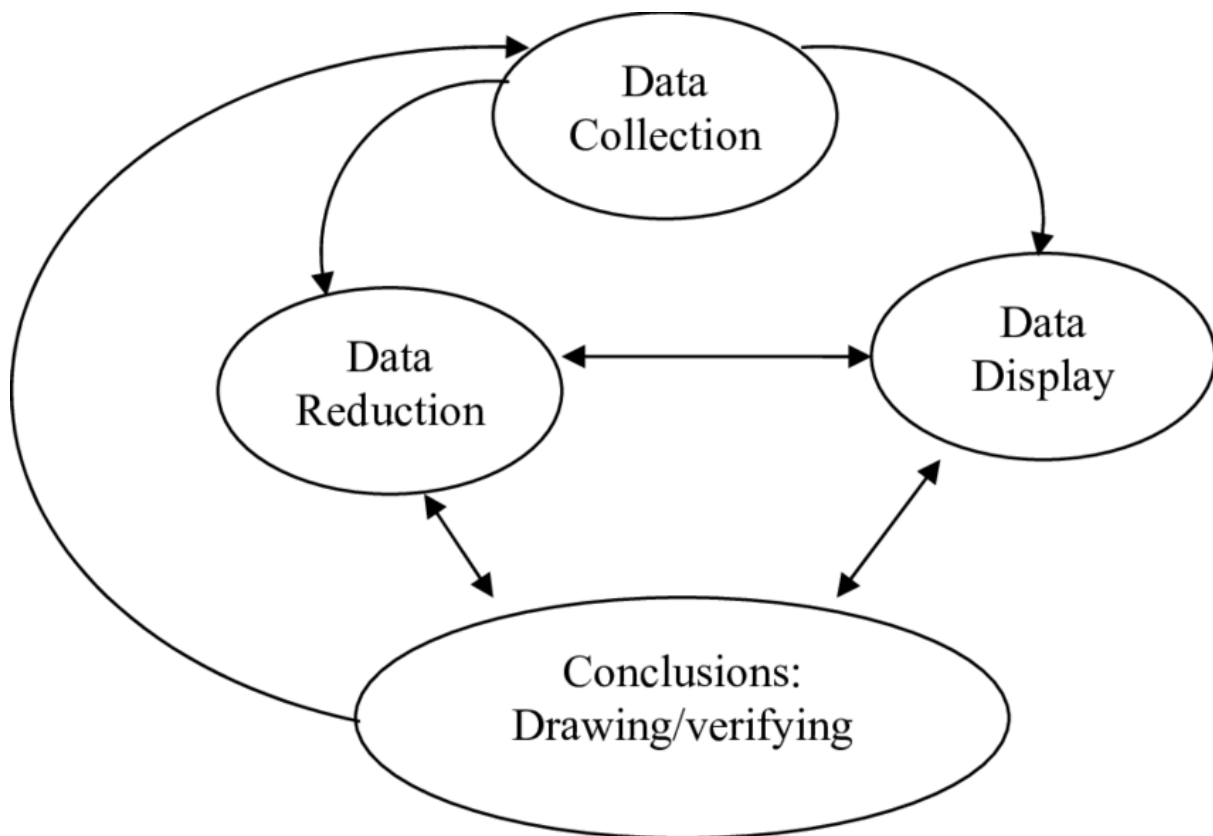
After all of the interviews were concluded, the researcher undertook the second cycle of coding, in which 'pattern codes' were assigned. This is a way to group summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes or concepts (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013:

79). This was based on deductive coding to provide explanation to the research questions. Cross-case analysis showed some differences in the views of participants. To ensure that there was a high level of reflexivity throughout the study, the researcher used several techniques (Cohen, et.al, 2011). This included reflection on the researcher's positionality to enable the reader to understand their subjectivity and prior assumptions about the topic and to enhance the rigour of the research (Bradbury-Jones, 2007).

With regards to data display, the pastoral support process was displayed as diagrams of students experiences, demonstrating the frontline providers of pastoral support and the differences in provision between the period before lockdown was announced and after. Diagrams show key concepts organised "in terms of their relationships through time or in a process rather than as static concepts" (Lofland et al., 2006: 216). A Venn diagram was used to show the intersectionality of available pastoral support, which originates from programme-level to department, Faculty, institutional and beyond the institution (see Figure 2). The feedback from participants was organised in a matrix (see Table 2). These are based on a "cross-classification of two or more dimensions, variables, or concepts of relevance to the topic or topics of interest" (Lofland et al., 2006: 214). In this case, the information was organised in terms of experiences pastoral support prior to lockdown due to Covid19 and during the lockdown period, enabling the reader to visualise the differences.

With regards to the last part of the process, drawing and verifying conclusions, the researcher followed up with participants at several points of the study to gather feedback and confirm the findings of the research. This includes, at the end of the interviews, in the first cycle of coding and after themes emerged from the second cycle of coding. Each participant was provided with a summary of their views to ensure that the findings reflected their views (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Figure 1:** Components of data analysis (Source: Miles, Hubermann, & Saldaña, 2013)



### 3.5 Ensuring quality and rigour

In order to establish the validity and reliability of the findings of the research, its methodology must be considered trustworthy. To ensure quality and academic rigour, a research project must be critically assessed for its trustworthiness and credibility (Shenton, 2004). There are four elements to address in this section: the value of honesty, applicability, consistency and neutrality (Guba, 1981).

There are two main aspects for validity in a research project: internal validity, which assesses the extent to which the instruments measure what they aim to measure; and external validity, which is based on the ability of the project to generalise its results and the representation of data (Walliman & Buckler, 2008). The feedback from the pilot interview was used to improve the effectiveness of the interview questions in gathering data which answers the research questions. This established internal validity. External validity can be demonstrated in two ways. Firstly, the researcher made efforts to ensure that the findings are a true representation of the participants' views, by producing thick, verbatim descriptions and sharing the subsequent analysis with participants ((Slevin & Sines, 2000). Secondly, it can be noted throughout the discussion of data, that there is a critical engagement with other

literature, to present how the study's findings compare with other similar studies (Sandelowski, 1995). The findings of the study fit well with other studies regarding institutional pastoral support. Attempts to find similar studies was challenging, considering that the experiences of people in Covid19 are relatively new and this is the only study which had explored an institution's pastoral support system in the context of Covid19.

With regards to applicability and consistency of findings - This project adopts an interpretive inquiry paradigm which is based on the notion that social reality is not objective or singular, but is instead defined by human experiences and social contexts, and is, therefore, best studied through the subjective interpretations of participants, within the socio-historic context (Cohen, et. all, 2011). The research did not seek to create generalisations, for it was accepted that all social and behavioural phenomena are context-bound' (Guba, 1981: 86), based on ontological and epistemological assumptions. Also, it is acknowledged that case studies such as this one represent a particularity are not generalizable. However, the in-depth experiences and rich descriptive data makes it possible to transfer the findings to other contexts. The experiences of students are relatable (Bassegy 1999) and illuminate aspects of student support systems which need to be addressed by similar institutions. Every institution is impacted by Covid19, so activities that ensure an effective pastoral support system for students will be of interest to the wider sector and are worthy of wider dissemination.

In regards to neutrality, interpretive researchers, themselves being an instrument in the study, adopt flexibility in order to dive deep in the issues to interpret them, which can be at the cost of objectivity (Guba, 1981). Despite the inevitable common ground between the interviewer and interviewees, the researcher managed to maintain a neutral stance throughout the data gathering process. In regards to consistency, the semi-structured interview schedule ensured that all participants were asked questions around the same topic. Although, the semi-structured format relies on conversational nature and there may have been differences in the phrasing of the questions and the approach for follow up questions.

The quality of conclusions drawn in a study is determined by the reliability of methods (Yin, 2014). The question about reliability that is addresses is: 'could a different researcher have drawn the same conclusion having conducted the same study, crucially, on the same participants?' (Yin, 2014:46). Moreover, reliability refers to the 'consistency and replicability of findings over time, over instruments and groups of respondents.' (Cohen et al., 2011:199). Through providing a comprehensive methodology section and a detailed analysis conducted

in the study, another researcher will be able to follow the logical steps, produce similar themes and reach the same conclusions presented in the study.

### **3.6 Ethical considerations**

This study was undertaken in accordance with the ethical guidelines for educational research issues by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) and received ethical approval from the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) at the University of Oxford (see Appendix E). A separate online ethics application (EthOS) was submitted to the Research Ethics and Governance Committee at the Manchester Metropolitan University as Gatekeeper for research on its staff and/or students, a process for external researchers (Appendix G). The research only commenced after both these approvals were granted.

When undertaking research, activities which involve human participants must protect the rights and well-being of participants, researchers and institutions (CUREC, 2016). The CUREC application (Appendix F) discussed the potential ethical concerns with regards to the study and the steps that the researcher took to address them. The ethical concerns included research bias, power, informed consent, respect for anonymity and privacy. The participants' best interests were of primary concern as the research was conducted.

As the researcher is an employer at the institution, they addressed any potential for bias by being as objective as they could throughout the data collection and analysis stage. The researcher was transparent about their positionality and prior experiences, resolved conflicts of interest and acknowledged limitations in the study. To avoid potential conflicts of interest, the researcher avoided interviewing any of their friends, many of whom have an interest in pastoral support. The researcher only considered those interviewees with whom there was a professional relationship. This helped keep the interactions professional and focussed on the subject matter. The researcher also ensured that participants did not feel pressured to participate as it was emphasized at various points in the research that participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any point prior to the publication of the study.

The pilot study demonstrated that there may be some differences in power between the researcher and the participants and these needed to be addressed. Participants can feel the need to fabricate their experiences to satisfy the researcher, causing the data collected to be inaccurate (Fattore & Mason 2005). The flexible nature of the interview design allowed the researcher to address these issues. Follow up questions posed by the researcher helped

ensure that answers were sufficiently explained and justified by the participants. The researcher kept a neutral stance throughout the interviews to avoid putting undue influence on participants' answers. The participants were informed and reminded of the nature of the study. They were also reminded that there was no right or wrong answer (Morrow & Richards, 2007).

Participants were informed that all information derived from the data collection procedures was confidential, safely stored, anonymized and destroyed following the completion of the study. All participants were allowed the chance to view the data they submitted, and they were requested to check that it was a true representation of their views. (Miles et al., 2014). As mentioned in Data Collection, the researcher sought voluntary informed consent from each of the participants for taking part in the interview and allowing it to be video-recorded via 'Participant Consent Forms'. The recordings and transcripts were saved in a password protected Onedrive account provided to the researcher by virtue of being a student at the University of Oxford. All participants reflectively positively regarding their experience of having taken part in the study.

The research demonstrated beneficence, as it aimed to provide insightful information about the pastoral support system in a Higher Education institution. Effective pastoral support positively enhances the student experience and is even more important in the context of Covid19, which makes this research very important, at a time when no such study exists.

### **3.7 Limitations**

This section will identify a number of limitations and attempts to resolve them. It is important to recognise limitations to enable the reader to gauge the quality of the research project. Interpretive researchers focus on individuals' interpretations about a subject and theory is based on the data generated (Cohen all, 2011), rather than, in contrast with normative researchers, testing a theory or hypotheses. The advantage is that the data is more relevant and connected to the participants. The challenge is to maximise the range of available information. The researcher made use of as many policy documents, website and secondary sources of data to explain the pastoral support system at the selected institution. However, the study falls short as it is only able to explore pastoral support at one institution. It is recommended that the provision of pastoral support should be explored at other institutions to get a fuller understanding of the impact of Covid19 on staff and students' experiences.

Due to constraints on time and resources, the researcher was dependant on participants saying yes to invitations, rather than a strategic selection process. As discussed earlier, many participants did not respond and some cancelled at the last minute. Had the participant selection been more defined in order to reflect the demographics of the institution, it may have borne results which would be considered a more effective representation of the views of the student body.

Similarly, as noted in an earlier section, the participants come from a range of different programmes, levels and backgrounds. The findings represented the experiences of these students. For findings to be more evaluative, the research could focus on programme, department or discipline specific information by interviewing staff and students from these areas only. However, the aims of this research were not to confined but to enable an exploration of experiences. The study acts as a gateway and a template for future research through a methodology that can be adapted for similar studies.

One of the biggest challenges, which no one would have anticipated at the start of their masters' degree, was the impact of Covid19 on everyone's lives. For the researcher, there were disadvantages but also some advantages. The main disadvantage was that they were not able to avail their contacts, by being able to knock on their doors. Had the circumstances been normal, the researcher would have approached more individuals as they would have been present on campus. Had the researcher not been an employee at the institution, they would not have known where to start.

Conducting interviews online, rather than in person, brings a perception of complexity, which can dissuade participants from taking part in the research (James & Busher, 2012). Online interactions can seem like there is a distance between the actors. As the researcher knew the participants and vice versa, there was trust regarding the aims of the project; and the familiarity helped participants share their views and experiences.

### **3.8 Researcher's positionality**

The researcher chose to write in the third person so to enable them to exercise objectivity. Whilst conducting this study, the researcher wore different hats, which brought advantages of contextual knowledge and understanding of the topics discussed (Kacen & Chaitin, 2006). This enabled the researcher to establish rapport with the participants and enabled the participants to open up to the researcher.

As an employee of the institution, which was considered as a case study in the research, the researcher was an insider and shared many commonalities with the research participants. These include their experience of studying in UK Higher Education institutions and utilising the pastoral support systems. The researcher shared with the participants an interest in the personal tutoring system and a desire to improve it. They were well aware of the policies and processes pertaining to the pastoral support and personal tutoring system and how they work in practice. In addition to their knowledge and awareness, the researcher had attended a number of workshops in which personal tutoring and pastoral support was discussed. As a result of being exposed to the content as well as conversations with those in the field, they developed a well-rounded understanding of the subject.

As the researcher conducted their undergraduate and postgraduate studies at different institutions, they were able to act as an outsider in carrying out the research. This was apparent as the researcher reflected on the similarities and differences in the students' experiences compared to their own experience as a student.

The researcher has had their own student journey transformed as a result of effective pastoral support. They attribute most of their academic and professional success to personal tutors, mentors and coaches. They used this experience as a strength in the interviews. At the same time, they were alert regarding the potential influence of their experience and expectation weighing on the conversations. They addressed this by suppressing their personal thoughts and made the participants feel as though they were the 'experts' on the topic (Berger, 2015:227) on their views regarding pastoral support. This enabled them to be critical, honest and reflective about their experiences.

## Chapter 4: Pastoral support system at MMU

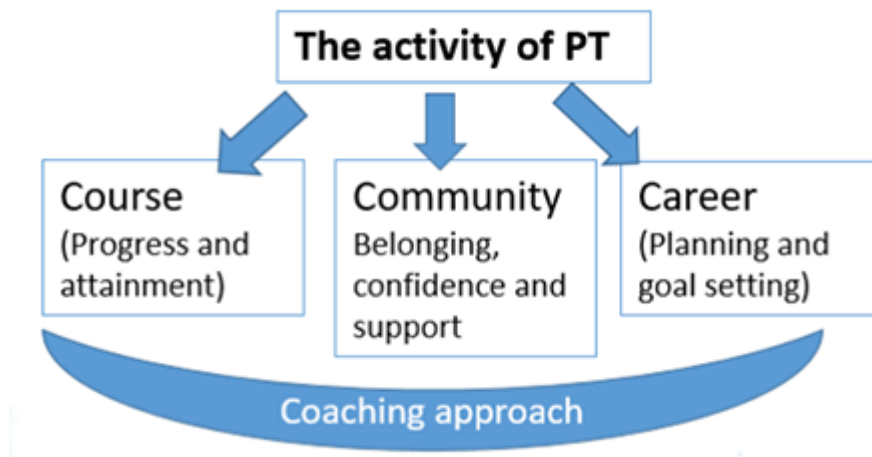
The pastoral support system at MMU has been an institutional and strategic focus for the University for many years. As a post-1992 university, Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) has a high proportion of 'non-traditional' students. In the academic year 2018/10, 38% of the student population was aged 21 or above, 31.9% were from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, 14.1% had a known disability, out of which 35.1% had a specific learning difficulty (Annual Equality Monitoring Report 2019). There are many of institutional initiatives in place to support students from different backgrounds. This section will highlight the ones related to the provision of pastoral support.

The personal tutoring system is highlighted in the University's Strategy for Learning, Teaching and Assessment as Principle 4: 'Maximise student confidence, progression and success through outstanding personalised and individual support.' (SLTA, 2014). This statement was agreed upon in consultation with the academic community as well as the Students' Union. The personal tutoring system is housed in the University Teaching Academy (UTA), which can best be described as a professional service area of the University which is led by academics to support the academic community in the institution.

The UTA have a number of resources to help academics with learning and teaching activities, and they developed a new personal tutoring framework in September 2019. This is easily accessible on the intranet and has been promoted and received very well by the academic community, from anecdotal experience. The framework provides comprehensive and practical guidance to academic staff members who act as personal tutors with a number of useful resources. It defines the role as follows:

'A personal tutor's role is to work with tutees to support them in progressing through their time at university. Activities will come under three categories (the 3Cs):

- Course focussed support for academic progress
- Community building through encouraging participation in a learning community and signposting to support services when required; and
- Career planning support towards an identified career path.' (UTA website, 2019)



**Figure 2:** A coaching approach for personal tutoring (Source: UTA website, 2019).

MMU's approach to personal tutoring allows 'freedom in the design and content of personal tutoring systems as appropriate to the discipline. Teams should work to design a system which they can tailor to their students' needs and that they will explain at programme validation events (PEAR) and give account of annually through the Education Annual Review process (EARs)' (UTA website, accessed 15 June 2020).

According to the above, there are two points at which the personal tutoring system is formally evaluated by the institution, the Programme Enhancement, Approval and Review events (PEARs) and the EARs. In practice the systems are also evaluated at department, Faculty and programme level as they engage with institutional processes. In line with sector practice, MMU has moved away from fixed-term sexennial programme reviews, which meant that every programme underwent an approval/re-approval process every six years in order to continue to run. This has been replaced by risk-based reviews, which means that programmes can be referred to the approval/reapproval process via the EARs or by the academic team themselves, allowing for greater flexibility. The need-based reviews, rather than automatic reviews, mean that resources are dedicated more effectively. The new process allows programme teams to be empowered to take decisions to innovate or refresh their programme content, and also allows struggling programmes to be referred for review. The last cycle of this review process was in 2019/20, which enabled programmes to be approved for an indefinite period, subject to this process.

The Educational Annual Reviews (EARs) take place annually and its purpose is to evaluate departmental health by considering metrics such as student satisfaction, progression, timely completions, degree classification and graduate outcomes. If there are any issues raised in students' comments in the NSS, this is explored with the department and actions are set to

address the issues. In some years, there are specific themes which are explored, such as the departmental approach to personal tutoring, differential outcomes, or in the coming round of EAR's, the departmental response to Covid19. Due to the flexible nature of the personal tutoring system, the approach is often set by the programme team, though in many cases, it is department-led.

Although the evaluation process is very robust, it needs to be ensured that the personal tutoring system continues to be evaluated at the programme level, given the flexible institutional approach. In practice, there are differences in the way departments and programmes organise the personal tutoring system, for example, in some programmes, students will be expected to be allocated the same personal tutor throughout their student journey whereas in others, they will be allocated different tutors. Similarly, some programmes will have 'Year tutors' who provide pastoral support to the (typically small) cohort in a year. The merits of the programme team's approach would be discussed at the PEARs. This reinforces the importance of departmental team to have a thorough oversight of how personal tutoring is undertaken in their departments and programmes so the approach can be scrutinised and evaluated at the EARs, for enhancement purposes.

Pastoral support is also provided by Student Services, which have reorganised the departments into three key strands from September 2020. There is an Inclusion and Pastoral Services area, which will incorporate a wider safeguarding remit including Chaplaincy services; a Counselling, Mental Health and Wellbeing Services area; and a new Disability and Inclusion Service which will provide more specialist support to students who fall in the following categories such as caregivers, under 18 years of age, pregnant, care experienced and those with a disability. The key providers of pastoral support in professional services are the Wellbeing Team, who have a number of Wellbeing Officers, which can be referred to students by the academic community. They are based in the Faculties and aim to 'provide students with easy, local access to first-tier support as well as developing a preventative approach to mental health issues' (Annual Equality Monitoring Report 2019: 7). Student Services also comprise of the Academic and Study Skills team which provide dedicated academic support to students and is another central service to which academic staff can refer students. In the last academic year, Student Services launched the 'Student Referral Guide 2019', which provides comprehensive guidance regarding referrals, including list of teams and contacts which students can be referred to for specific types of issues or specialist support.

The UTA were proactive and responsive to update their guidance following the announcement of the lockdown by the government in March 2020. They released a 'Frequently Asked Questions' section on the website, which addresses concerns such as confidentiality, approaches to encourage student engagement and access to resources about the use of technology. As the researcher is an employee at the institution, there is an inherent bias to view their workplace positively, due to the positive experience they have had personally and professionally. However, in line with some of the literature on distance and online provision, much of the training in the context of Covid19 is focussed on activities such as how to create a video and speak in front of a camera. There is a lack of narrative about exploring deeper topics, such as connecting with students through the screen, supporting students with anxieties and addressing the uncertainty regarding Covid19. It is perhaps assumed that this is covered elsewhere, as other resources are sign-posted, such as by the UK Advising and Tutoring association (UKAT).

## Chapter 5: Findings, Analysis and Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore the provision of pastoral support in the context of Covid19 from students' perspective. The first step in understanding and organising students' experience in the current climate was to rigorously analyse the data. The data was analysed by a thematic analysis method, using the framework provided by Miles and Huberman (1994). As part of this exercise, the researcher had developed a suggested list of codes from the literature, which were expanded as the interviews took place during the first stage of coding. These codes were then organised in 18 categories which were then grouped into main themes in line with the research questions.

The results of this study provides some rich examples of students' experience of pastoral support and illuminate what students and staff value. However, it is important to reiterate at the outset that the conclusions drawn from the information shared by the participants may not reflect the complete nature of the pastoral support system at the institution. The process of gathering and analysing the data, though not scientific, was systematic in its approach, as discussed in chapter 3. It did become apparent that much of the information analysed had some common elements and produced similar themes. This information has been organised in accordance with the research questions to provide a framework for the exploration of key issues.

### 5.1 Overview of experiences

There were 27 participants - 17 students, 6 academic staff members and 4 professional services staff. Out of the 17 student participants, 11 were student representatives on their programme. Every participant had varied experiences to share and after much contemplation, the researcher has organised the data according to the research questions, showing the emergent themes and exploring the issues brought about by Covid19. Although the analysis is divided into experiences before Covid19 lockdown was announced and experiences during the lockdown, there are many connections made in the two sections and some overlapping issues and topics.

The data emerging from interviews with professional and academic staff, and student representatives in particular, showed some very positive experiences. The data showed that all of the participants had a very good knowledge and awareness of the pastoral support system. This included students' appreciation and knowledge of 'where to go' for support and staff's awareness of the personal tutoring framework. Student participants were well aware

of their personal tutor, and the support offered by the central professional services, such as the wellbeing team. Overall, students reflected very positively regarding the pastoral support provided by staff, prior to Covid19, as well as in the period after. The researcher was privately very impressed with how student participants, in particular the student representatives, shared their experiences in a balanced and thoughtful way, backing their views with examples and providing constructive feedback when prompted.

One of the ice-breaker questions posed at students, regarding the reasons for their choice of programme and university, revealed that a few students had a perception of MMU being an institution known for its supportive learning environment. This played a key role in their university choice compared with other institutions which were perceived to be more 'daunting' or where one might have been 'left on their own'. Students who held this view felt glad that through their student experience, their preconceptions were validated, as they commented positively on feeling supported and having an intellectually stimulating experience in their programme of study.

Academic and professional services staff spoke of the robustness of the process, referred to the use of the personal tutoring framework, discussing the process during PEARs (programme review events). Academic staff praised the usefulness of the printed copies of the Student Referral Guide and the support offered by the University Teaching Academy. A key point that became apparent after all the student participants had been interviewed, were the differences in the type of pastoral support they had received or utilised. The following activities were mentioned but they were not consistent across the board - study skills development, goal setting, coaching, mentoring, referrals. There was no fixed approach, owing to the diverse needs of the students and the flexibility of a system which has departmental oversight.

The matrix below, based on interviews with students, provides a snapshot of how the provision of pastoral support was adapted to operate through the lockdown period.

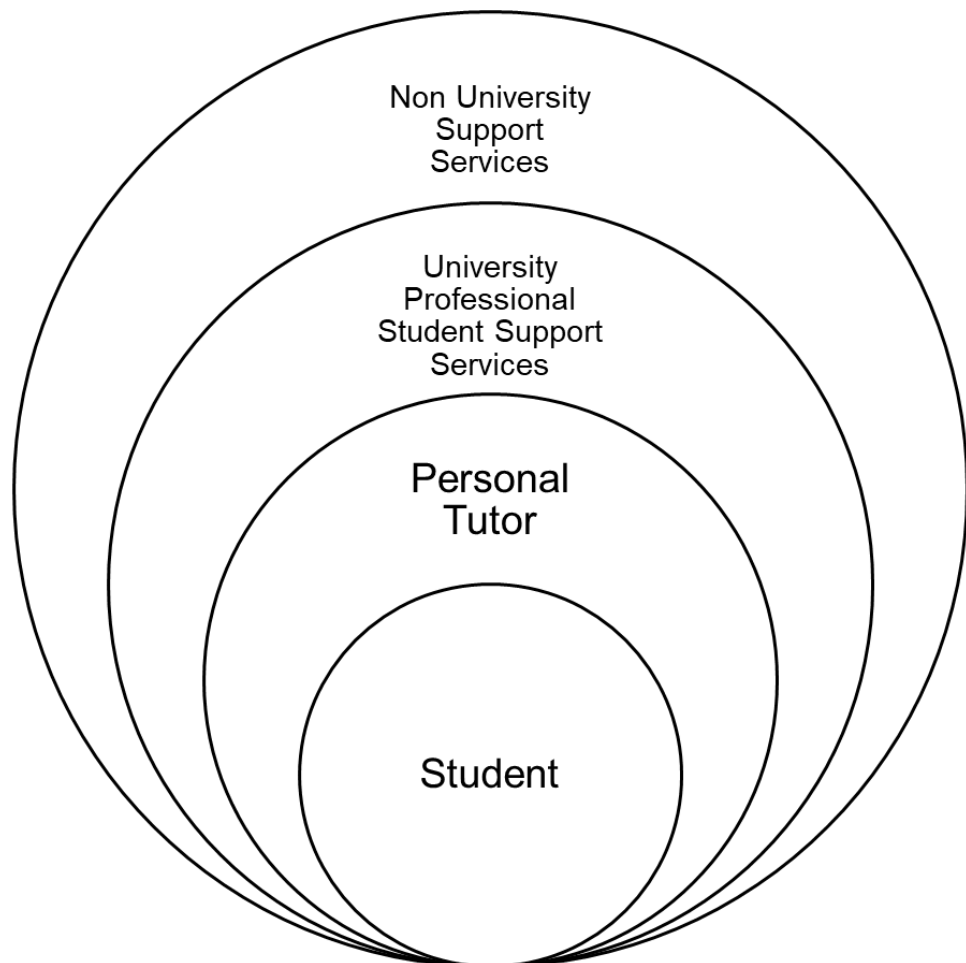
**Table 2:** Matrix of student experiences of pastoral support, before Covid19 lockdown and during the lockdown period.

<b>Pastoral Support Services</b>	<b>Pre-Covid19 lockdown</b>	<b>Covid19 (from 17 March 2020 to 20 August 2020)</b>
Personal Tutor	Office hours By Appointment Virtual or telephone	Virtual or telephone
Hubs Team	Open office Telephone	Telephone support
Wellbeing Team	Office hours By Appointment Virtual	Telephone support
Careers	By Appointment Virtual Events and workshops	Virtual or telephone
Academic Study Skills Team	By Appointment Virtual Events and workshops	Virtual or telephone
Library - academic skills support	By Appointment Virtual Events and workshops	Virtual or telephone
Students' Union	By Appointment Events Sports Societies Advice Centre	Virtual or telephone access to the Advice Centre only

## 5.2 Pre-Covid19 lockdown experiences

The venn diagram below demonstrates how students accessed pastoral support before the lockdown, when times were 'normal'. Although the university's central support services are accessible to students, most students accessed specialist support through their personal tutor, who would act as a gateway to further support..

**Figure 3:** an illustration of how students typically accessed pastoral support prior to Covid19 lockdown.



### 5.2.1 Academic and social integration

All students at the undergraduate level had interacted with their personal tutors at least 'once a term'. Data showed many varied examples of how students had used the pastoral support systems in their unique student journey. Personal tutors were viewed as the key providers of pastoral support but every student had some interaction with professional services support. Data showed that students believed that the support provided by the professional areas complimented the support provided by personal tutors and the system 'would be incomplete'

without the role of professional services. This is in line with studies which place importance on a cohesive and well-coordinated support services (Audin et. all, 2003).

S1, a level 3 student reflected upon the guidance that their tutor had provided in making the transition to university life and selecting their chosen pathway. All of the undergraduate students appreciated the personalised support offered to them, which enabled them to settle into their programmes, excel academically and make the most of University life. Most students who were interviewed commented that they eventually settled in their programme. They attributed this to the efforts of their personal tutors and some students also mentioned their programme leaders. It appeared that the personal tutors for these students, were meeting their core objective: integrating them into the institution (Thomas, 2006)

Some of the postgraduate students spoke about how their dissertation supervisor were also their personal tutors and they not only helped them with their academic work but also in many other ways. S16 and S15, doctorate students, mentioned that their supervisors who also undertook pastoral duties, shared their own career journeys and guidance about teaching, publishing journal articles and attending the relevant academic conferences. They felt that this experience was invaluable in helping students in their own career pathways. Positive, two-way relationships between personal tutors and students have been emphasized in many studies (Sodabowski et. all 2003; Hixenbaugh et, all 2006).

Students used a number of adjectives to describe the qualities of their tutors – motivational, knowledgeable, inspirational, brilliant, expert in their field, encouraging, friendly, supportive engaging, approachable. A key barrier in establishing connectedness with students was noted to be staff's accessibility and approachability (Shin 2002), which was not referred to or experienced by any of the student participants.

### **5.2.2 'Life changing' influences of pastoral support**

Many students shared a number of personal experiences of how pastoral support transformed their higher Education experience and changed their lives for the better.

S2 commented that their personal tutor took a vested interest in not just their academic progress but also their wellbeing. They had struggled with a previously undiagnosed disability and only found out about it towards the end of their first year. They spoke very passionately about how their tutor empowered them to overcome their struggles.

S3 noted that, as a mature student on their programme, they struggled to fit in in their first year and used to wonder if university was for 'someone like them'. Their personal tutor encouraged them to get involved in seminar discussions, group work and social activities outside the course. Eventually they settled in their programme.

S7 commented that they had gone against the advice of their friends and parents and opted for the BSc route of Economics solely because their personal tutor saw their potential and encouraged them to pursue their strengths. They said they felt they had much better career prospects because of that crucial choice.

S8, an international student, mentioned that they struggled with academic writing throughout their first and second year, as English was not their first language. They said that, 'it was not just the lack of academic writing skills', but 'I lost focus and felt that because of it, I did not fit in, I did not belong.' Due to the encouragement of their personal tutor, they sought support from the Library's workshops and resources on academic writing skills. Consequently, their academic performance improved and so did their confidence and sense of belonging.

S10 mentioned that, after enrolling on their programme, they developed doubts about whether it was the 'right' programme for them. They contemplated switching or changing their course, or starting afresh on a new course. However, the programme leader was also their personal tutor. They addressed their concerns and provided them with guidance. They encouraged them to get involved with the wider university extra-curricular activities and when they acted on their advice, over time they developed a real passion for doing well in their degree.

S9 mentioned that, after experiencing a bereavement in the family, they developed anxiety and depression. They said that, were it not for the support and guidance of their personal tutor, they would have 'given up'. In praise of the University's wellbeing and counselling service, they said, 'they pulled me out of darkness'.

S11 mentioned that, in addition to being a part-time student, they were running a business full-time. They said, due to the applied nature of the programme they were on, they appreciated the coaching and mentoring approach which tutors had. They mentioned that, even though they had 'years' of experience, they were still learning from their tutors and applying the lessons to their academic and professional life.

S17, a doctorate student, who was also undertaking teaching duties, mentioned that, their entire career was a result of the support and guidance they had received from their personal tutor and supervisor. They mentioned that the team were 'like a family'.

A number of students highlighted challenges they had experienced in their dissertation and final projects. Some said that tutors, 'went out of their way' to support them, 'intellectually challenged' them and 'kept tabs on their academic progress'. A couple of students mentioned that without the support and guidance of their tutors, they would not have succeeded in these crucial assessments.

It is worth noting that although in the literature review, it was mentioned that students are increasingly seeing themselves as consumers. In the accounts above, there was no indication of relationships being transactional (Shin 2002). Students were very much behaving as learners rather than customers.

### **5.2.3 Evolving issues, concerns and interests**

As the researcher spoke to student participants which ranged from level 3 to doctorate level, it became apparent that students' issues, concerns and interests evolved over each year of study. At level 3 and level 4, students spoke about how there was a proactive effort from tutors to arrange meetings and ensure that they are settling in at University. Some students reflected on how this approach changed over the levels or gradually declined. The doctorate level students commented that due to an overwhelming emphasis on independent studying at that level, it is sometimes assumed that PhD students have 'made it' and will 'just get on with it' and 'if they need anything, they will just ask for it'. However, this was not always the case and 'students sometimes appreciate being taken back to the basics'.

At level 6, it was apparent that students were concerned about their academic performance in their final year and their future career prospects. Therefore, their expectation from their personal tutor was different, in that they expected discussions with about academic progress, career readiness, aspirations, but that 'it did not always happen'. One final year student reflecting on their student journey, remarked that 'Covid19 has added another dimension to all of this'.

The majority of students agreed that the pastoral support provided was tailored to their situations and adapted as they progressed through the academic years. Some students acknowledged that they required the same sort of support 'typically expected in first year'.

One final year student commented that 'it's like after first year, we are forgotten, until NSS survey is taking place.'

When it was discussed with academic staff, they reported students' changing needs and expectations over the years (Quinn 2004). It was suggested by A2 that, in an effort to focus on students who were struggling, less serious concerns would sometimes 'go on the back-burner' and receive less attention. This slightly contradicts the generally understood notion that the more engaged students are, the more they benefit from their studies (Jelfs et. all 2004). As in the case of one account of an academic staff member, they would focus more on students they were 'worried about' than those who they presumed 'would be alright'. They admitted that, if they had more time, they would invest it more strategically.

#### **5.2.4 Importance of 'informal' support**

Many students in the interviews, noted that much of their personal and professional development occurred in interactions which would be regarded as 'informal'. Students provided many examples of social interactions, such as events organised on the programme, or meetings with a tutor for coffee, or 'running into a tutor in the corridor' – opportunities which students would avail to discuss not just academic queries in a formal setting but discuss their goals or ambitions, lecture content or 'even just talk about football'. Similarly, some students noted that, the 5-10 minutes spent at the end of a lecture asking questions were invaluable to their learning and development. A couple of students commented that 'when things were normal', they would be able to 'knock on a tutor's door, if they ever had an issue'. It is this type of support which students believed, 'simply cannot be replicated virtually'.

When asked about how an informal environment could be created virtually so that students could feel comfortable asking questions and feel like they belong to the group, some students suggested the use of social media. One student suggested the use of 'memes, giphs and emojis'. They also suggested that the programme team had used blogs to engage students with course content which they found interesting. Another student mentioned that one of the tutors were innovative in the way they used Zoom breakout rooms, enabling students to talk to each other in different groups and finding creative solutions to academic issues. Some studies have shown that some students have report that they did not know who to go to for pastoral support, particularly when tutors focussed on formal obligations such as monitoring engagement and students' work (Basset et. all, 2014; Myers 2008; Malik,

2000). It is essential that the elements of support considered 'informal', such as a friendly 'chat', or an interest in students' wellbeing, are cultivated.

### **5.2.5 A sense of community**

This was an emerging theme as students discussed their experience of pastoral support. When students were made to feel a sense of belonging, they felt more engaged with their programme. Similarly, when tutors made efforts to cultivate support networks, this was appreciated by students. Many students spoke fondly about being part of study networks and having made friends from extracurricular activities such as sports and societies. Student engagement initiatives and activities which promote a sense of 'belonging' have been found to be key contributors of student success (Thomas 2012).

Students reflected that it is possible to maintain a sense of community during the lockdown period. S4 mentioned that their tutor had organised 'virtual coffee and tea events' which were well received by students. S7 mentioned that, once the government had announced social distancing measures, they went on a 'socially distant walk' as a way of catching up with their tutor.

### **5.2.6 Coaching and mentoring approaches**

When the researcher asked about what it was that made the provision of pastoral support effective, whether this was pre-lockdown or in 'a Covid19 world', they used words like 'mentoring' and 'coaching', to describe interactions with tutors which were considered to be beneficial. It is clear that when tutors are proactive in their engagement with students, this plays a transforms their student experience into a positive and fulfilling one. It was emphasized that this approach was particularly helpful in the context of Covid19, as the pandemic had brought uncertainty in every aspect of life. Students appreciated proactive engagement from their tutors as they navigated through the 'unknown'. The feedback reflected the hybrid model of personal tutoring at MMU.

## **5.3 Experiences during Covid19 lockdown**

Overall, students were satisfied with how the university responded to the Covid19 'crisis' and agreed that continued to feel supported. Some students mentioned that there was a 'bit of a delay' in communication, and 'for a while, it felt like we were in the dark', but, 'we understood that the university itself was figuring things out'.

On the question of how pastoral support was being adapted, some students said that they felt that 'it is the same, but virtual'. Many students commented on the notion that 'it does not quite feel the same'. On the whole, students were very positive about university communications regarding teaching arrangements in the final term, final assessment alternatives and the introduction of the block delivery model. Most students suggested that arrangements for pastoral care and support were either not as formally communicated or there was no communication about it at all. A few students said that activities expected within pastoral support was lacking, explaining that, 'it's not that I don't know where to go to for support' but that 'it would have been nice if someone had reached out and asked me, 'are you alright?'

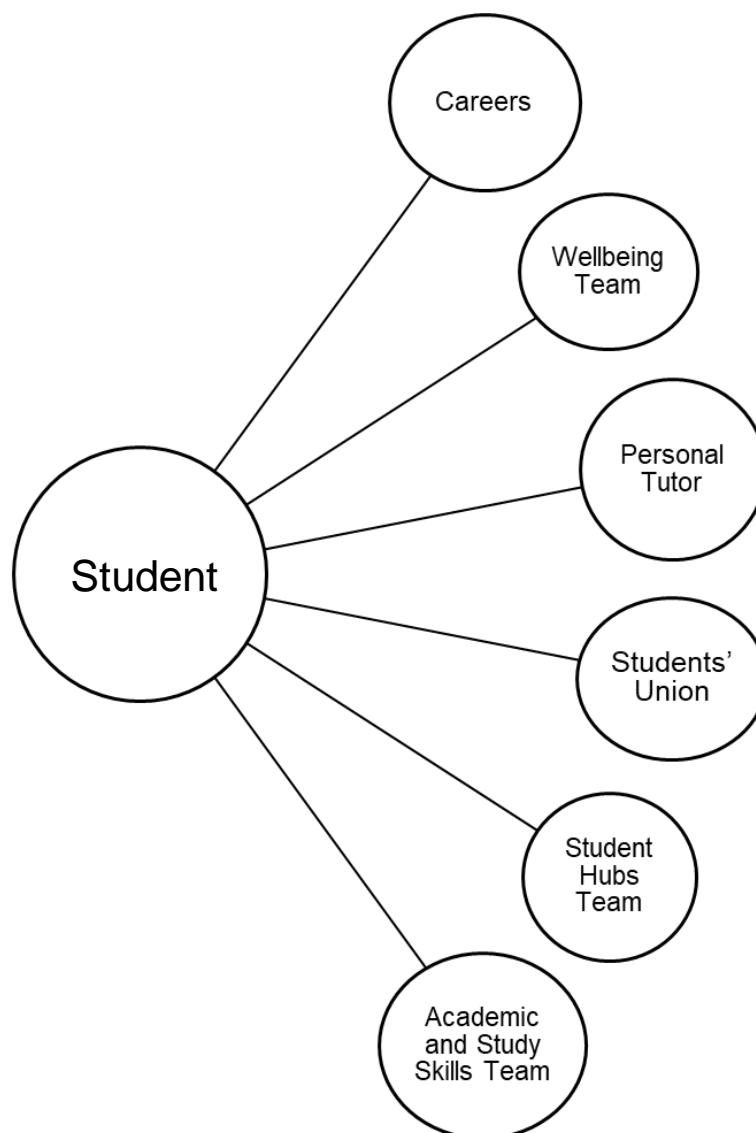
Many students said that tutors were very supportive and sympathetic during this period. They said that they understood their 'anxieties' but that 'what was going on was out of their control'. Most students expressed concerns about Covid19 and its impact on their quality of life, the job market, their mental health and wellbeing. They were also worried about their friends and family, especially those who had vulnerable status or belonged in industries which had suffered directly as a result of the lockdown.

Some students said that, tutors or student representatives, set up 'whatsapp' groups, which made a massive difference, as they felt that were connected with their cohort and took solace in the fact that 'everyone was in the same boat'. Understandably, the students who were interviewed prior to their assessments, expressed anxiousness about their deadlines. Students who had submitted all of their work shared concerns about their results as they were waiting to receive them. Almost all students agreed that the uncertainty brought about by Covid19 concerned them.

Some students were unaware that certain university services were still being offered and accessible online, highlighting that communication could be improved. One of these students commented that, 'students don't check their emails' and recommended that the university should reach out to students on the communication channels which they use, such as 'texting or social media'.

Based on the interviews conducted, figure 4 shows an illustration of how students were accessing support during the lockdown period. Comparing it to the Venn diagram above, it can be observed that there is a lack of oversight which one would expect from a personal tutor or a dedicated member of staff.

**Figure 4:** An illustration of how students have accessed pastoral support during the lockdown period.



### 5.3.1 Keeping track of academic progress

A number of students mentioned that, due to the lockdown, they had ‘lost a sense of routine, as the days have blended together’, as a result of this, they had struggled to keep themselves organised. Some students were worried about not meeting their own expectations and others mentioned concerns about not meeting their potential. They mentioned the importance of receiving help with planning their study schedules and being held accountable to them. One student explained it as follows ‘when times were normal, I would be in a study group and we would go to the library and do things together. Now I feel

so unmotivated because there is no one to do things with, or be held accountable to. Keeping tabs on Whatsapp is just not the same.'

### **5.3.2 Making the most of technology**

During the lockdown period, all of the meetings with tutors and staff were taking place online. On the whole, students commented that it 'worked well', considering that it was 'the only option'. Some students had daily or weekly meetings with their tutors at the start of the lockdown period, with very few having less frequent or no meetings at all. Students raised a number of concerns and issues with 'the new normal way of doing things'.

Most students shared the perception that virtual meetings are 'just not the same' as meetings in person. The main reasons for this are: the perception of a distance; lack of body language display which students acknowledged plays a role in communication; one student commented that, 'it's very abrupt, you log into a meeting and you just get straight to the point – there isn't much opportunity for small talk, and then abruptly the call ends, and it's like there wasn't a natural way to say goodbye, like when one leaves a room.'; another student commented that, 'as it is the case in this interview, I am distracted by my own face (referring to Skype video), rather than being able to talk comfortably about issues, I'm worried about how worried I look.'

Many students noted that the balance between academic and pastoral support was tilted towards academic 'almost entirely'. They added that this was understandable, considering that the majority of their concerns were about academic issues. Some students noted meetings were all about academic progress, 'leaving no room for any discussion about mental wellbeing'.

A number of students commented on internet and connectivity problems, one of them noting that, 'everyone is at home using the internet for work, study or entertainment, and it's brought the bandwidth down – the internet companies never expected such traffic'. One student commented that 'there is always a perception of a lack of quality when it is an online course, and the same goes for personal tutoring meetings.' They further reflected that, 'if this is the way things are going to be, then how are we different from the Open University?' There were some comments which indicated that technology could be used more effectively by students as well as staff. One student noted that, 'in a meeting, I could just show my tutor my work in person, show them my workings and talk through how I came to my conclusions. This isn't possible on Skype'. When the researcher suggested the screen-sharing function of

Skype, they appeared not to know about it and commented, 'it's just not the same.' Similarly, a doctorate student mentioned that they would share their work with their supervisors 'multiple times, in three different documents and wait for them to add all their comments before working on it', commenting that, 'I wish there was a way to work on the same document at the same time, so that everyone could see what everyone else was saying'. When the researcher suggested the use of Onedrive which had this functionality, they were not aware of it.

A couple of students commented on the 'humanistic side' which has been noted as a phenomenon of working at home. They noted that, when they met their tutors virtually, they could 'see their homes, and sometimes their kids and their pets, and it would be heartening to note that tutors have lives, families and other obligations,' and it showed that 'in a way, they are just like everyone else'.

Some students said that online meetings worked very well and they felt no difference to the meetings they had had with their tutors in person. They attributed this to the relationships and bonds they had already developed with their tutors over the years. It will be a challenge to establish similar relationships with new students starting in September, but it will be ever more important. Students appreciated having a proactive link with the university.

### **5.3.3 A flexible approach**

Some students commented that pre-Covid19, tutors would have set office hours for on campus support, wherein students would be able to meet with them. They added that some tutors were sticking with this 'rigid' approach during the lockdown period, even though fixed timings are no longer convenient. It was suggested that one of the positives of 'this new way of life' was that work and study patterns could be more flexible to suit different lifestyles. S5 mentioned that, in addition to their study and work commitments, they also had caring responsibilities and therefore could not always avail fixed timings or open hours. It was acknowledged that there are many opportunities brought about by this new way of life, and one of them was flexibility in the way people work and study. On the whole, most students agreed that tutors were available when they needed support.

Academic and professional services staff reported a rise in the demand for student support during the lockdown period. Some academic staff mentioned that technology had meant that they were more easily accessible meant that they were expected to be available whenever there was a need, and this often had an impact on their work-life balance.

### **5.3.4 Closing the 'loop'**

All of the student participants who were interviewed had accessed a number of central support services of the University, after being referred to them by their tutors. Some shared the view that, 'it would be good if the teams spoke to one another'. In some cases, personal tutors were aware of the steps undertaken once a student went beyond them and accessed specialist support such as wellbeing, careers and counselling services. In most of the cases, they did not appear to know what had happened after their referral. Personal tutors play an important role in sign-posting; they should be informed about what happens after their referrals so that there can be an effective follow up and a consistent level of support is offered to students. This will ensure that no student is left unsupported, providing a cohesive offer of institutional support services (Dhillon et. all, 2008).

### **5.3.5 Employability prospects**

Every student participant raised concerns about their future career prospects in the context of Covid19. S9 mentioned that every news story flashes a dire future which can instil feelings of hopelessness and affect the way students feel about their future. Many students mentioned that they no longer feel confident about their job prospects and emphasized that this needs to be an area which the University prioritises for graduates. It was acknowledged that the university had recently launched an internship programme to provide an employability boost for the class of 2020, however, there were only 85 places but there were hundreds of applicants.

According to a survey by the Institute of Student Employers, more than a quarter of employers have cut their graduate recruitment (Young-Powell 2020). The National Union of Students have found that 81% are worried about their job prospects and 71% are concerned about employability (Sellgren 2020). The impact of this ever-changing job market remains to be seen, but drawing parallels to the 2008 financial crash, English graduates who were employed during this period were earning 12% less than their pre-crash counterparts at the same stage in their careers, and also owed 60% more in student debt (O'Connor, 2013). Some academic and professional staff emphasized that we must encourage students to remain positive and continue to look for new prospects and opportunities, such as the rising demand in technological, health-based and some public sector graduate employers like Teach First and Police Now.

### **5.3.6 The 'onus is on the students'**

Regarding the question about making suggestions for improvements to the pastoral support system, every student emphasized that students' willingness to seek support and 'help others to help themselves' is essential if they are to avail the benefits of support mechanisms. Many students reflected on their own experience of taking the initiative of seeking support, finding out information which would enable them to overcome problems, making the effort to undertake the work that was required of them by tutors and considering tutor's advice and feedback. Students who were student representatives provided many examples of encouraging other students to seek support when they required it.

Some student participants stressed that 'the support is there, if students are willing to do their bit'. In the second phase of coding, the researcher pondered about whether to include this as a thematic element when it was distinctly noticeable. The reasoning was that, perhaps, as this was a highly engaged group of students, therefore it is expected that they would view students' engagement as being crucial to a fulfilling educational experience. However, students' engagement has been highlighted as being a key element in ensuring that they are satisfied with the support provided (Stephen et. all, 2008; Prowse et. all 2020). All academic and professional staff agreed that students must take the initiative and show willingness to accept the relevant support.

## **5.4 Experiences of staff**

The academic and professional staff who were interviewed emphasized that they considered this part of their role to be very rewarding and fulfilling. The academic staff highlighted issues of time constraint and workload, especially posited by the necessity to transform entire programmes to new delivery models in Covid19. They highlighted that within a matter of weeks and months, they played a key role in digitising assessments or creating alternative assessments, made teaching content and resources available online and often times worked through evenings and weekends.

Academic staff shared many observations about issues experienced by the academic community in general, rather than their own personal experiences, but these views are still worthy of inclusion. A1 mentioned that there are many academics who heavily rely on sign-posting students to other services because they are unsure about how to handle certain problems or because it is not in their remit to resolve them. Additionally, the diversity of issues posit a challenge and knowing what to do is not always straightforward. There has

been some resistance in accepting pastoral duties such as careers advice or wellbeing support by academic who do not see it as their responsibility (Tett et. all, 2017).

A3 mentioned that academic staff members often struggle in their quest to strike the right balance between 'tough love' and mollycoddling and it can be a dilemma to know which approach would be most suitable for students (Mckie, 2018). A2 stated that, in a number of instances, the barriers to providing optimal support can be pinned down to lack of training, support, resources and knowledge. However, they acknowledged that MMU was a far better institution in this regard from their previous experience of working at similar universities.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

As Universities grapple with the new reality brought about by Covid19, the research set out here is important to consider for the purpose of enhancing pastoral support systems for students. The timing of this study lends relevance and utility for anyone interested in the subject. The study confirmed the researcher's anecdotal experience that, pastoral support was less systematically adapted, compared to the immense task of digitising teaching content, assessments, resources and developing new delivery models. The themes discussed in this study will allow universities to better understand students' expectations and experiences.

The literature review showed that there were already many pressures on pastoral support systems in HEIs in the UK. This includes growing student numbers, the increasing diversity within the student demographics, worsening staff/student ratios and a student body characterised by a sense of entitlement which comes with investing in the cost of a university education, as well as increasing costs of living. The number of students who do not fit in the traditional entry profile of students are exception additional and more personalised support from fewer staff who have less time, due to competing demands in relation to research, learning and teaching, administrative responsibilities, all of which are compounded by the pressures of Covid19. It was noted that the student body has become fragmented, and an increasing number have part-time work and other commitments such as caring responsibilities. These issues have been magnified due to Covid19.

When the researcher set out to undertake this study, they were expecting to uncover many problems with the pastoral support system in the case study. The data, findings and discussions show that the institution considered as a case study has a very strong pastoral support system for students, though of course, further enhancements are necessary to cope with the unpredictable and ever-changing circumstances experienced by the whole sector due to Covid19, some of these have been acknowledged in the study. The evidence has shown that although the pastoral support system was not systematically adapted in a visible manner, the institution was quick to respond to challenges and tutors took a proactive approach in supporting and guiding students through a period of uncertainty. There are still many questions to be answered about how the positives of on campus pastoral support are replicated. Nevertheless, the study has reinforced that students appreciate staff who continued to take a vested interest in their academic, professional and personal progress. Staff who have been proactive, supportive, approachable, motivational and resourceful were

generously praised by students who took part in the study, emphasizing the best practice identified in the literature.

The practical implications from this research are that universities can use the insights to consider the pastoral support system in a holistic and systematic manner. Pastoral care and support can come from academic, administrative and professional staff, and it should be monitored and evaluated collectively, rather than disjointedly. There must be clarity regarding the process of pastoral care and support, including its many dimensions, and its status should be elevated. Staff have a significant role to play in supporting students' sense of belonging and connectedness to the University. They should be supported in fostering relationships which encourage regular, open and clear communication, promote stability and provide genuine concern and empathy for the challenges experienced by students. Key to student success and wellbeing are meaningful relationships, and in the current climate, they are ever more important.

There have been many benefits of conducting this research, some of which were unexpected. For a small-scale research activity, constrained by time and resources, it is fulfilling to know of some of the positive impact that the study has had already. The findings and recommendations within this research will be shared with the University Teaching Academy staff who were very welcoming and encouraging towards this research. It will also be shared with other academic and professional staff who have expressed an interest in learning about this.

The study started a dialogue in the institution and much of the feedback gathered will be used in a number of positive ways. For example, one of the students raised that, when they missed a few classes consecutively due to being ill, they were sent an automated letter, which they did not appreciate, as it did not even address them by name or acknowledge what they were going through. This feedback will be provided to the Student Engagement and Monitoring team who play an important role in identifying and supporting students who may be on the verge of dropping out of their programme. There may be a positive ripple effect of this: should communication with students in this category become more personalised, it may provide a reason for a student to carry on in their programme, rather than the alternative. As retention is a key university priority, all ideas which may improve it, would be welcomed by the team.

Similarly, students who were not aware that some services were still operating virtually during lockdown, became aware as a result of interacting with the researcher. Students and

staff who took part in the study reflected on their experience and considered the role they play in improving support mechanisms for themselves and others. Student participants who are either teaching or on course to go into academia and undertake pastoral support duties reflected how they would conduct themselves. The researcher themselves, a staff member in the institution, developed many professional links in the institution and learned many important lessons as they carried out the research. They were able to think and learn to act critically, without any bias.

## **6.1 Limitations of the study**

As with all research, this study is not without its limitations. The sample of students interviewed in this study had experiences which were very personal but mostly had positive conclusions. As the researcher has worked at the institution for a few years, they know from anecdotal experience that there are a number of students who have raised concerns about not knowing who their personal tutor is, not having enough contact time with them, or some of the other reasons for dissatisfaction mentioned in the literature review, such as lack of interest from tutors, or lack of follow up from staff. The researcher believes that one of the reasons why the majority of student participants were the ones who had benefited from the pastoral support system and hence spoke positively, was because they were what would be considered as 'engaged' students. 11 of the 17 student participants were student representatives and even the rest were very engaged with their programmes. Not every student sample would be representative of these experiences. It would be difficult to find dissatisfied students, but their voices must also be considered.

Many institutions experience issues of inconsistent pastoral support, whether this is programme level, department or faculty specific and the case study was no different. Further research is required to find out whether the findings are consistent across other focus groups in other departments and institutions.

## **6.2 Suggestions for further research**

This research has laid down a foundation for further enquiry regarding the provision of pastoral support in the context of Covid19. The findings of this study can be used to advance similar studies in other institutions. Comparable research can be carried out with different groups of students, such as those representing a programme route, discipline, level, department and faculty. Similarly, further research with different students belonging to demographics, such as gender, ethnicities and socio-economic background would yield insightful results. The findings of those studies can be compared or contrasted with the

findings of this study to understand the full context of the requirements of effective pastoral support systems in Covid19 and beyond. Observation methods can be used to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of interactions which happen between staff and students when pastoral support is offered. These would be more challenging to undertake, considering the social distancing requirements in most places, however, technology can play an important role in further research.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Interview Invitation Emails

### Email for Students

Dear *Student*,

Hope this email finds you well.

I am inviting you to consider participation in a research project exploring the provision of pastoral support for students at MMU, in the context of Covid19. This is an exploratory study, organised by Mishal Saeed, a postgraduate student at the Department of Education, at the University of Oxford. I am contacting you as your views as a student will be valuable for the study.

Your views will be regarded as anonymous. Please find attached the Participant Information Sheet, which will provide you with more details about the project and information regarding how your data will be processed for the study.

The interview will take be conducted online by Skype video or by phone, take approximately one hour, and will revolve around the following areas:

- What has been your experience of receiving pastoral support by staff?
- What sort of issues have been raised by students and how are they resolved?
- What are the challenges (if any) in raising and resolving issues?
- How can pastoral support for students be improved in the current situation?

The study will also explore staff's experience of providing pastoral support.

This is an entirely voluntary study. If you would like to participate, please confirm by email. I will then email you options to choose a one-hour time-slot on Skype.

If you have any queries, concerns or questions, please let me know.

Best wishes,  
Mishal

## Email for Academic/Professional staff

Dear *staff name*,

Hope this email finds you well.

I am inviting you to consider participation in a research project exploring the provision of pastoral support for students at MMU, in the context of Covid19. This is an exploratory study, organised by Mishal Saeed, a postgraduate student at the Department of Education, at the University of Oxford. I am contacting you as your views will be valuable for the study as you are involved in providing pastoral support.

Your views will be regarded as anonymous. Please find attached the Participant Information Sheet, which will provide you with more details about the project and information regarding how your data will be processed for the study.

The interview will be conducted online by Skype video or by phone, take approximately one hour and will revolve around the following areas:

- What has been your experience in providing pastoral support to students?
- What sort of issues are raised by students and how are these resolved?
- What sort of issues or challenges have you experienced, in providing pastoral support, if any?
- How can pastoral support for students be improved in the current situation?

The study will also explore students' views and expectations regarding pastoral support.

This is an entirely voluntary study. If you would like to participate, please confirm by email. I will then email you a consent form, an interview schedule and options to choose a one-hour time-slot on Skype or by phone.

If you have any queries, concerns or questions, please let me know. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,  
Mishal

## Appendix B: Interview Schedule



### Interview Schedule

**Research project:** Pastoral support for UK Higher Education students in the context of Covid19 – A case study

**Principal investigator:** Dr XXXXX

**Researcher:** XXXXX XXXXX

The interview will take place over approximately one hour.

For academic/professional services staff

1. Describe your experience of providing pastoral support to students? (10 min)
2. What sort of issues are raised by students?
  - a. How are these resolved?
  - b. How do these compare with concerns raised in the context of a lockdown? (10min)
3. How is pastoral support being adapted in the current climate? (10 min)
4. What sort of issues or challenges have you experienced, in providing pastoral support, if any? (20 min)
5. How can pastoral support for students be improved in the current situation? (10 min)

For students

1. What motivated you to study at Manchester Metropolitan University and your chosen course? (5 min)
2. Describe your experience of receiving pastoral support by staff? (5 min)
3. What, in your view, are the key issues facing students in this environment? (10 min)
4. What sort of issues have you raised whilst seeking pastoral support? (5 min)
5. Reflecting on your student journey, how have the issues evolved over the years? (5 min)?
6. How have these issues been resolved? (10 min)
7. What have been the barriers or challenges for pastoral support to be effective? (10 min)
8. How can pastoral support for students be improved in the current situation? (10 min)

Interview Schedule

Date: 18 April 2020. Version 1.0

*Pastoral support for UK Higher Education students in the context of Covid19 – A case study*  
*Dr XXXX XXX, XXXX XXXX*

## Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet



### UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

#### DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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**Director** Professor XXXXXXX

### Participant Information

*Please take some time to read this information and ask any further questions if anything is unclear. Contact details can be found on page 4 of this document.*

**Research project:** Pastoral support for UK Higher Education students in the context of Covid19 – A case study

**Ethics Approval Reference Number:** ED-CIA-20-201

**Principal Investigator:** Dr XXXXXXX

**Researcher:** XXXXX XXXXX

#### What is the purpose of the study?

This study explores the provision of pastoral support for students in the context of Covid19. As institutions are focusing their efforts on redirecting teaching provision and assessments to online fora, there is a risk that adapting personal tutoring and pastoral support is comparatively less systematic. The mental health and wellbeing of students and staff have been prevalent issues in Higher Education. For students, pastoral support from their tutors, and other members of staff, can make a massive difference to their wellbeing. In the current context of Covid19, the crisis of mental health and wellbeing has worsened.

This exploratory study intends to examine the views and experiences of academic and professional service staff and students regarding the provision of pastoral support at Manchester Metropolitan University, at this time. The study aims to do the following:

- explore the nature of pastoral support offered to students in the context of a lockdown;
- identify issues and challenges experienced by staff providing the support and students experiencing it;
- offer potential solutions.

## **Who is organising and supporting this research?**

The research for this study is being undertaken by XXXXX XXXXX, who is a MSc (Master of Science) student in the Department of Education at the University of Oxford. This project is being supervised by Dr XXXXX XXXXX, who has extensive knowledge and experience pertaining to educational research. The project has been ethically reviewed and approved by the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) on 2 June 2020, Reference number: ED-CIA-20-201. The research project has acquired Gateway Approval from Manchester Metropolitan University (EthOS Reference Number: 24004).

## **Why have I been invited?**

You are being contacted by the researcher as they have identified you as someone involved in pastoral support and they believe that you have something important to contribute for the purpose of the study. Participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse participation, refuse any question and withdraw at any time without any consequence whatsoever.

## **Do I have to take part?**

It is not compulsory to take part in this study and you may ask the researcher questions or ask for more information before deciding whether or not to participate. We believe that as a stakeholder in pastoral support provision, your contribution to the study will be valuable, and we hope that you will participate in the research. If you agree to take part in this study you will be asked to sign a consent form. Please note, however, that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

## **What will taking part involve?**

### *For Academic/Professional staff*

The interview will be conducted online (over Skype) or by phone, take approximately one hour and will revolve around the following areas:

- What has been your experience in providing pastoral support to students?
- What sort of issues are raised by students and how are these resolved?
- What sort of issues or challenges have you experienced, in providing pastoral support, if any?
- How can pastoral support for students be improved in the current situation?

### *For Student Officers/Students:*

The interview will take be conducted online (over Skype) or by phone, take approximately one hour, and will revolve around the following areas:

- What has been your experience of receiving pastoral support by staff?
- What sort of issues have been raised by students and how are they resolved?
- What are the challenges (if any) in raising and resolving issues?
- How can pastoral support for students be improved in the current situation?

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher. All digital data will be stored on password-protected servers using OneDrive, hosted by the University of Oxford, as the data-controlling entity for the study. Participant names will be stored in a separate password-protected file on the same OneDrive.

## **Are there possible disadvantages or risks from taking part?**

As in-person interviews are not allowed due to Covid19, the primary data that is required for this study will be collated virtually. Therefore, there are no risks for the participants. We hope that the experience of taking part in this study will be enjoyable for you. You will at no point be obliged to talk about any topic that makes you uncomfortable.

As a researcher, I have a safeguarding duty for all participants and information shared with me. If during the interview, I come to believe that you are intending harm to yourself or others, I will report this to the relevant authorities and I will discuss this with you first.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

The direct benefit to you from taking part in this research is that you are provided with a chance to look back reflecting on your staff or student experience. In a broader sense, you will be able to contribute to deepening the understanding of students' experiences of pastoral support in the context of Covid19 so that improvements can be made to their experience. If you are a staff member, you will be sharing your perspective on providing pastoral support which is not as explored in the recent literature. Moreover, you will help to add to the knowledge of best practice regarding personal tutoring and pastoral support provision.

### **What will happen to my data?**

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to how your personal data is used in the study. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/compliance/gdpr/individualrights/>

Data protection regulation requires that we state the legal basis for processing information about you. In the case of research, this is 'a task in the public interest.'

The information you provide as part of the study is the research data. Any research data from which you can be identified (eg. your name, audio recording), is known as personal data. It does not include data where the identity has been removed (anonymous data). We will minimise our use of personal data in the study as much as possible.

Information gathered in the interview will be de-identified by default, unless the participant consents to have their name listed. The only non-anonymised data will be for signed consent forms, video/audio recordings and transcripts, which will be collected and retained as part of the research. These will be stored securely by the researcher on Onedrive (provided by the University of Oxford). Only individuals from the University of Oxford will have access to these records. This information will be held for up to three years (12<sup>th</sup> September 2023) after the publication of the study, as per the University of Oxford's [Policy on the Management of Research Data and Records](#).

### **Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential with only the researcher and the principle investigator having access to it. You will not be able to be identified in any ensuing reports or publications. We would like your permission to use direct quotes with your name replaced by an English name beginning with a random English letter (A-Z) in the final study.

The study will comply with the legal requirements regarding the storage and use of personal data as set down by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (GDPR) and the UK Data

Protection Act 2018; and adhere to the ethical process of the University of Oxford and BERA's ethical guidelines.

### **What will happen to the result of the study?**

The University of Oxford is committed to the dissemination of its research for the benefit of society and the economy and, in support of this commitment, has established an online archive of research materials. Once the study is complete, an online and printed copy will be stored in the archives of the Department of Education library, at the University of Oxford, which is accessible to the members of the institution. The study will also be shared with senior academic and professional services staff members at the Manchester Metropolitan University, as the host institution being considered in the case study.

### **Who should I contact for further information?**

If you have any queries or questions, please email XXXX XXXXX: [XXXXXXXX@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:XXXXXXXX@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk) or the Principle Investigator, Dr XXXXXXXXXXXX at [XXXXXXXX@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:XXXXXXXX@education.ox.ac.uk). Alternatively, you may write to Dr XXXXX XXXXX at the Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY.

### **What should I do if I have any concerns or complaints?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this project, please speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your query. The researcher should acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how they intend to deal with it.

If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford (Chair, Social Sciences & Humanities Inter - Divisional Research Ethics Committee; Email: [ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk); Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD). The chair will seek to resolve the matter in a reasonably expeditious manner.

You may also contact the Research Ethics and Governance Manager at Manchester Metropolitan with any questions, concerns or queries at [ethics@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@mmu.ac.uk) quoting the EthOS reference number 24004.

If you remain dissatisfied, you have the right to make a complaint to the UK's Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) on their website: [www.ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/](http://www.ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/)

Participant Information Sheet

Date: 18 April 2020. Version 1.0

*Pastoral support for UK Higher Education students in the context of Covid19 – A case study*  
Dr \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Consent Form



Department of Education,  
University of Oxford



**Principal investigator:** Dr XXXX XXXX  
**Researcher:** XXXX XXXX  
**Email:** [XXXXX.XXXXX@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:XXXXX.XXXXX@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk)  
**Phone:** XXXXXX

Study Code:                      Participant identification number:

		0	0	1
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### CONSENT FORM

**Research Project title:** Pastoral support for UK Higher Education students in the context of Covid19 – A case study

*If you agree, please enter your initials*

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated..... <b>18 April 2020...</b> ( <b>version....1.0..</b> ) for this study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.	
3. I understand that the information I share in the interview will be used to address the aims of the study, which will be look at by individuals from the University of Oxford. I give permission for these individuals to have access to this information.	
4. I agree to the interview being audio/video recorded.	
5. I understand that the information held and maintained by the Researcher will be solely for the purpose of the study and may be used to inform me about the research.	

6. I agree to take part in this study.	
--	--

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name of Participant*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name of Person taking  
Consent*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

*\*1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher site file; 1 (original) to be kept in notes.*

Consent Form

Date: 18 April 2020. Version 1.0

*Pastoral support for UK Higher Education students in the context of Covid19 – A case study*

*Dr \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_*

## Appendix E: CUREC Approval Email

26/06/2020

Email - [redacted] Outlook

[↩ Reply](#) [🗑 Delete](#) [🗑 Junk](#) [Block](#) ...

### Re: Application for Ethical Approval - CUREC1

🕒 You forwarded this message on Tue 02/06/2020 17:57



Tue 02/06/2020 15:11



To: Education Research Office; [redacted]; [redacted]

Dear [redacted]

Title: Pastoral support for UK Higher Education students in the context of Covid19 – A case study. ED-CIA-20-201

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted.

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application you should submit details to [research.office@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:research.office@education.ox.ac.uk) for consideration.

Good luck with your research study.

Best wishes

[redacted]

Dr [redacted] Tutor



University of Oxford/Department of Education

[redacted] Norham Gardens, Oxford, [redacted]

Tel. [redacted]

Email [redacted]@education.ox.ac.uk

[www.education.ox.ac.uk](http://www.education.ox.ac.uk)

[@OxfordDeptofEd](#)

Just published: Geography mentors' written lesson observation feedback during Initial Teacher Education, *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*. Puttick, S. & Warren-Lee, N.

<https://outlook.office.com/mail/deeplink?version=2020061402.02&popoutv2=1>

1/1

## Appendix F: CUREC Approval Form

### CENTRAL UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (CUREC)

### Form CUREC 1A Checklist for the Social Sciences and Humanities



The University of Oxford places a high value on the knowledge, expertise, and integrity of its members and their ability to conduct research to high standards of scholarship and ethics. The research ethics clearance procedures have been established to ensure the University is meeting its obligations as a responsible institution. They start from the presumption that all members of the University take their responsibilities and obligations seriously and will ensure that their research involving human participants is conducted according to the established principles and good practice in their fields and in accordance, where appropriate, with legal requirements. Since the requirements of research ethics review will vary from field to field and from project to project, the University accepts that different guidelines and procedures will be appropriate.

- Please check ["Where and how to apply for ethical review"](#) and the [CUREC flowchart](#) first to see if you need ethics approval.
- Please complete this form using a word processor and email it, together with your [supporting documents](#), to your [Departmental Research Ethics Committee \(DREC\)](#) (if applicable). If you don't have a DREC please email this form to [ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk) using your official [ox.ac.uk](mailto:ox.ac.uk) email address. **Only type-written, emailed applications will be accepted.**

<b>SECTION A: Filter for CUREC 2 application</b>		
This section determines whether your study raises more complex issues requiring the completion of a full application for ethical review, known as the CUREC 2 application. <b>(Please mark 'X' in the Yes/No column.)</b>		
1. Are research participants classed as <a href="#">people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question</a> ? (This may include under 18s (although see <a href="#">"competent youths"</a> ), prisoners, or adults "at risk".) Your attention is drawn to the University's <a href="#">Safeguarding Code of Practice</a> and its implications for researchers involving children or adults at risk. This includes the need for the work to be risk assessed and for researchers to undertake related training. <b>(Note: If any of your participants are aged 16 or under, answer 'Yes' here and also answer question 5 below.)</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. By taking part in the research, will participants be at risk of criminal prosecution (e.g. by providing information on drug abuse or child abuse)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. Does the research involve the <a href="#">deception</a> of participants?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. Does your research raise issues relevant to the <b>Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (the Prevent duty)</b> , which seeks to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism? Please see advice on this on our <a href="#">Best Practice Guidance web page</a> .	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If you answered 'No' to <u>all</u> the questions above, go to <b>Section B</b> . If you answered 'Yes' to <u>any</u> question above, continue to question 5 below.		
5. Is your project covered by a CUREC <a href="#">Approved Procedure</a> (formerly known as "CUREC Protocols")?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If yes, give the specific Approved Procedure number(s):		

If you answered 'Yes' to **ANY** of questions 1-4, **and** answered 'No' to question 5, **stop completing this checklist and do not submit it for ethical review**. Instead, complete the [CUREC 2 application form](#) from the CUREC website, then submit that for ethical review.

If you answered 'Yes' to ANY of questions 1-3, **and** answered 'Yes' to question 5, go on to **Section B**.

**SECTION B: Contact details and project description****Contact details:**

1. <b>Principal investigator</b> OR supervisor (if student research) (give title and full name)	Dr XXXX XXXX
2. Name of student (if student research)	Miss XXXX XXXX
3. Degree programme (if student research), e.g. BA, BSc, MSc, MPhil, DPhil	MSc Education (Higher Education)
4. Department or Institute name	Department of Education
5. Address for correspondence (if different from above)	Home address: XXXX XXXX XXXX.
6. University ( <b>not</b> private) e-mail address and telephone number	XXXX.XXXX@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk
7. Name and status of others taking part in the project (e.g. third year undergraduate; postdoctoral research assistant)	N/A

**Project description:**

8. Title of research project	Pastoral support for UK Higher Education students in the context of Covid19 – A case study
9. List of location(s) where project will be conducted	Manchester
10. If your research involves overseas fieldwork or travel and your department requires a travel risk assessment, will you have completed and returned a risk assessment form beforehand? (This must be approved by your department before you travel. If you are travelling overseas, you are strongly advised to take out <a href="#">University travel insurance</a> .) Please also address any physical or psychological risks for Oxford researchers and local fieldworkers in Section 16 below and discuss with your safety officer.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not required in this instance <input type="checkbox"/>
11. Anticipated duration of overall research project	6 months or years (maximum 5)
12.a) Anticipated start and end dates of the part of the research project involving human participants and/or personal data	From: (28/05/2020) To: (10/08/2020) <b>Note:</b> You will need ethics approval <b>before</b> you start your research. CUREC 1As may take up to 30 days to process. <b>Retrospective ethics approval cannot be granted.</b>
12. b) In the case of international or collaborative research, will you submit or have you submitted this project for ethical review or consideration elsewhere (e.g. collaborator's/local ethics committee, or other local approval)?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If 'Yes', please attach ethics or other approvals and give more details below. If 'No', please explain your reasons below. Please also refer to the <a href="#">Best Practice Guidance on Ethical Review of social-sciences based research conducted outside</a>

	<a href="#">the UK</a> (BPG 16), which includes an Ethics Issues Checklist for International Research (Appendix A)
<p><i>Please supply further details in response to question 12b here</i></p> <p>Once granted ethical approval by my home institution (University of Oxford), I will seek Gateway Approval in the institution in which I will be conducting my fieldwork (Manchester Metropolitan University), where I am also a full-time employee.</p>	
13. <b>External</b> organisation funding the research (if applicable)	N/A
14. a) Title and brief description of <a href="#">research</a> (about 150 words) in lay language. When describing the research, include your methodology, how you are applying professional guidelines, and the use to which results/data will be put. <b>Please also declare any <a href="#">conflicts of interest</a> here.</b>	
<p><b>Title:</b> Pastoral support for UK Higher Education students in the context of Covid19 – A case study  <b>Issue:</b> The mental health and wellbeing of students and staff have been prevalent issues in Higher Education. For students, pastoral support from their tutors, and other members of staff, can make a massive difference to their wellbeing. In the current context of Covid19, the crisis of mental health and wellbeing has worsened. As institutions are focusing their efforts on redirecting teaching provision and assessments to online fora, there is a risk that adapting personal tutoring and pastoral support is comparatively less systematic. This exploratory study intends to shed light on pastoral support in the lockdown context by examining academic and professional service staff and students’ experiences and views on the provision of pastoral support at this time.  <b>Methodology:</b> The study aims to do the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. explore the nature of pastoral support offered to students in the context of a lockdown;</li> <li>ii. identify issues and challenges experienced by staff providing the support and students experiencing it;</li> <li>iii. offer potential solutions.</li> </ol> <p>The research involves an institutional case study, focused on Manchester Metropolitan University, primarily using online/ telephone semi-structured interviews with the following individuals:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Up to 15 Academic staff members</li> <li>ii. Up to 10 Professional Services staff members involved in pastoral support.</li> <li>iii. Up to 10 student officers or students, including from BAME backgrounds (as their views can be underrepresented)</li> </ol>	
14.b) Description of participants and how you will <a href="#">obtain informed consent</a> to take part in the research (about 200 words in total) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Description of participants <b>and</b> your criteria for inclusion/exclusion</li> </ol>	

Manchester Metropolitan University has been selected as a case study institution, giving insight into the way post-1992 institutions have dealt with the issue of pastoral support during lockdown. Participants will be selected purposively in order to include the different stakeholders involved in pastoral support: academic staff/tutor; professional service/administrative staff; students. Given the current limitations brought about by COVID-19 and the pressures on students and university staff, the inclusion of participants will depend partly on who responds to the invitation. For robustness and reliability of the study, I am hoping to involve:

- i. Up to 15 Academic staff members, directly providing pastoral support to students.
- ii. Up to 10 Professional Services staff members involved in supporting the personal tutoring system.
- iii. Up to 10 student officers or students, including from BAME backgrounds (as their views can be underrepresented)

2. Your method(s) of recruitment

As I am a full time employee of the institution, I can draw on my existing networks across the university and contact individuals by email once I have been successful in obtaining ethical approval and approval by my line manager and head of department. The email will inform them about aims of the study, outline what participants can expect and share the consent form.

3. Your processes for obtaining consent from participants

Once individuals have expressed an interest in taking part in the interview, I will provide them with relevant information to obtain their informed consent. If requested, I will also email them key questions in advance. Participants will be asked to sign consent forms digitally and email them back to me. In the interview itself, I will repeat the aims of the research and request permission again before starting the interview. The information obtained will be treated in compliance with GDPR and the UK Data Protection Act 2018.

Please **attach separate supporting documents (in Word)** if appropriate for your research (English language versions only). Tick those you are submitting below. If appropriate supporting documents are not submitted, you will be asked to provide these separately, which may delay the ethical review process.

- [Recruitment and advertisement material](#) (e.g. a poster, social media recruitment text, or brief invitation letter/ email)

- Information for participants to read (or hear) before they agree to take part (e.g. [written information](#) or, if applicable, an outline [oral information script](#)).
- A document to record informed consent. Templates for [written consent forms](#) and/or [oral information scripts](#) (in case of an oral consent process) are available from the CUREC website
- Questions to be asked of participants (e.g. interview questions, or a preliminary scope of questions, or a sample questionnaire)
- (If relevant) debriefing document after participants have taken part
- If you feel the above approaches are not appropriate for your study, provide details on how you will obtain consent from participants
- Please complete section 15 if you cannot obtain informed consent

Please see folder containing emails for the following groups:

- Academic staff
- Professional staff
- Students
- Student Officers

For each of the above groups, the participant information sheet will be attached to the email which will provide with them with additional information about the study.

15. If you cannot obtain informed consent from participants according to CUREC guidelines and good practice in your discipline, please give a brief explanation and justification of this decision below.

N/A

16. What are the ethical issues connected with your research and what steps have you taken to address them? **Please do not answer 'none'**. We need to see evidence that you have identified potential ethical issues with respect to your research and have taken steps to address them. If applicable, please address:

- Participant burdens and/or risks

The following are ethical concerns and steps that will be taken to address them:

- Research bias and power – as I am an employee at the institution where I am seeking subjects for my study (who I may know professionally). I have to be objective, resolve any conflicts and acknowledge limitations. At the same time, participants may feel pressured to participate due to existing relationships. I will, therefore, consistently emphasise that participation is voluntary and they can withdraw at any point.
- Informed consent – this will be sought at three points of the study –at the stage of advertising/initial email, recruitment (signed consent) and before the start of the interview. Participants will be informed that they can withdraw at any point of the study.
- Respect for anonymity – information shared will be treated as confidential. All names will be anonymised and any information that might identify participants will not be included in the thesis or subsequent papers.
- Privacy – Personal data (email address) will not be held after the completion of the study.
- Controversial issues – it is possible some participants may be critical of the current arrangements for pastoral support but be concerned about the implications of speaking out for their own careers or wellbeing. I will therefore emphasise that anything they say will be completely confidential and fully anonymised.

The researcher will make participants aware of the ethos of the study, which is to improve support for both staff and students.

- Your own physical and psychological safety as a researcher or of fieldworkers you may employ (see the [University's](#) and [Social Science Division's Safety in Fieldwork guidance](#))

As in-person interviews are not allowed due to Covid19, the primary data that is required for this study will be collated virtually. Therefore, there will be no risks to the participants.

- Data protection/ confidentiality (also see Section 18).

Participants will be informed clearly about:

- The purpose of the study and what information will be collected.
- Their informed consent.
- Their right to withdraw as a research participant

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. All digital data will be stored on password protected servers using OneDrive (provided by the University of Oxford). Participant names will be stored in a separate password protected file, hosted on the same Onedrive.

For more guidance on ethical issues, please see <http://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources>

The study will comply with the legal requirements regarding the storage and use of personal data as set down by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act 2018. This includes making participants aware of how and why their data is stored, the purpose for its use and to whom it will be made available.

17. Will your research involve discussing sensitive issues?

This could be information relating to race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, physical/mental health, trade union membership, sexual life or criminal activities.

Yes

No

*If you answered 'Yes', make sure you include some supporting information (as directed in Section 14 b.) above, showing the range of questions covering these issues.*

The only personal data collected for the purpose of this research will be for the requested consent form and the video/audio recordings and transcriptions which would enable me as the researcher to analyse the data for the purpose of the study. Participants' names will be completely anonymised in the thesis. Personal anecdotes shared by participants for this study will be anonymised. Any sensitive data that is shared will be treated in compliance with GDPR 2016 and the UK Data Protection Act 2018. It will also be regarded in accordance with the ethical process of the University of Oxford, as the data controlling entity and BERA's ethical guidelines. Participants will have the right to withdraw their information at any point, prior to the publication of the study (10 August 2020).

Due to the nature of the study, participants may share personal or sensitive information with me during the interviews. This will be treated as confidential and in accordance with safeguarding duties - If I as the researcher believe that the participant could be a harm to themselves or others, I will alert the appropriate authorities and inform the participant.

The information shared by participants will be anonymised in the study. It will not be possible to identify the participants via the study. The only way to identify participants is through the video/audio recordings or the consent forms and these will be placed on a secure Onedrive to which only myself and my supervisor will have access. This information will be held securely for up to three years, as per the University of Oxford's [Policy on the Management of Research Data and Records](#).

## 18. Management and handling of personal and other research data

For the purpose of completing this section, all information provided by participants is considered **research data**. Any research data from which participants can be identified is known as *personal data*; any personal data which is sensitive is considered *special category data*.

Management of [personal data](#) and [special category data](#) of human participants, either directly or via a third party, must comply with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, as set out in the [University's Guidance on Data Protection and Research](#). In answering the questions below, please also consider the points raised in the [Data Protection Checklist](#). For advice on research data management and security, please consult with the University's Research Data Team

([researchdata@ox.ac.uk](mailto:researchdata@ox.ac.uk)) and/or your local IT department, and the University's [web pages on research data management](#).

**a.) Please mark 'X' against the data you will collect for your research**

Consent records (written consent forms, audio-recorded consent, assent forms (for research involving minors) including participant name)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Online consent (may be anonymous)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Opt-out forms	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contact details for research purposes only (destroyed when no longer needed for this research)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Contact details kept for future studies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Audio recordings (preferably using PIN-protected audio recorder and stored on device's hard drive)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Video recordings	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Transcript of audio/video recordings	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Photographs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Task results (e.g. paper/online tasks, diary completion)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Questionnaire answers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Field notes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

**b.) For each of the types of data selected above, state how this will be physically transferred from where it is collected to a local secure storage site (and backed up as necessary). This includes paper records and data captured electronically.**

Consent record:  
 This will be an electronic form, saved in a file securely on Onedrive (Oxford University Microsoft account)

Contact details for research purposes:  
 This will be email or skype. Emails exchanged will be deleted, skype contacts will be removed after the study.

Audio/video recordings and transcriptions:  
 Interviews will be securely audio and video-recorded and transcribed by myself as the researcher. All data will be stored securely in password-protected files on OneDrive.

This information will be held securely for up to three years, as per the University of Oxford's [Policy on the Management of Research Data and Records](#).

<p>c.) How and where will <b>each type of data</b> be stored during the research (until the end of all participant involvement)? Describe the arrangements for ensuring confidentiality, i.e. location of storage (e.g. <a href="#">Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business, SharePoint</a>), security arrangements and de-identification of such data. Do not store unencrypted data in freely available cloud services or unprotected USB drives.</p>		
<p>All data will be stored in a secure Nexus 365 email inbox (when it is being used) owned by the University of Oxford, as the data-controlling entity.</p> <p>All other digital data and information will be stored securely on a password-protected desktop in password-protected files and backed up through OneDrive (provided by the University of Oxford, as the data-controlling entity).</p>		
<p>d.) Will you use a unique participant number on research data instead of a participant name?</p> <p>If <b>yes</b>, state whether or not you will retain a list of participant names against numbers (i.e. pseudonymisation via a linkage list). Where will the list be stored, and when will it be destroyed?</p>		
<p>Yes, all participants will be anonymised and provided with pseudonyms. A linkage list will be stored in a separate password-protected file.</p>		
<p>e.) Who will have access to the research data?</p>		
<p>Only me and my supervisor.</p>		
<p>f.) If research data is to be shared with another organisation, how will it be transferred / disclosed securely?</p>		
<p>The research data will not be shared with any other party.</p> <p>The study will be shared on publication.</p>		
<p>g.) When and how will identifiable data (including audio/video recordings &amp; photos) be destroyed or deleted?</p> <p><b>Note:</b> Records of consent should be retained for a <b>minimum of three years after publication or public release</b>. Some funders may require longer periods (see <a href="http://www.dcc.ac.uk/resources/policy-and-legal/overview-funders-data-policies">http://www.dcc.ac.uk/resources/policy-and-legal/overview-funders-data-policies</a>). If you wish to retain contact details in order to re-approach participants about future studies, you must detail this in information provided to them and obtain specific consent for this.</p>		
<p>Data will be stored securely and will be deleted fully across all drives on completion of the masters thesis and subsequent publications/.</p>		
<p>h.) Please confirm that you will store <b>other research data</b> safely for at least 3 years after final publication or public release and adhere to <a href="#">any additional research funder policies</a>. For more information about the University policies, please see the University's web pages on <a href="#">research data management</a>.</p>		<p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>      No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>If '<b>Yes</b>', please give details of who will store the data and on storage format, location and security. Note that <a href="#">open science</a> is encouraged.</p> <p>If '<b>No</b>', please provide further details below.</p>		
<p>The 'other research data (consent forms)' will be stored safely on my laptops hard drive for 3 years after final publication.</p>		
<p>i.) Does your research involve the use of secondary (i.e. previously collected) data? Common sources of secondary data include censuses, information collected by government departments, organisational records and data that was originally collected for other research purposes</p> <p>(If "<b>No</b>", please go to section 19.)</p>		<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>      No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>

j.) Do you have data access agreements for the use of this secondary data? (If so, please attach these.)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
k.) Is your use of this secondary data compatible with what data subjects/participants agreed that their data should be used for?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
l.) Could this data be linked back to an individual or individuals? If yes, address how securely any personally identifiable data will be transferred to you, and where and for how long it will be stored during or after the research. Who will have access to it?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>19. Publication and dissemination of research data</b>		
How will you disseminate and feedback project outcomes at the end of the research?	This will be via email once the qualitative data analysis has been undertaken and the study is concluded. Once my thesis has been published, I will contact all stake-holders with the link.	

**SECTION C: Methods and procedures to be used**

**Method used:** Please ensure you have addressed any potential ethical issues related to these methods in Section 14 and in your Participant Information Sheet

**Please mark 'X'**

- |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Analysis of existing records  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 2. Snowball sampling (recruiting through contacts of existing participants)                              | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 3. Use of casual or local workers e.g. interpreters  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 4. Participant observation   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 5. Covert observation  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 6. Observation of specific organisational practices  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 7. Participant completes questionnaire in hard copy  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 8. Participant completes online questionnaire or other online task                                       | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 9. Using social media  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 10. Participant performs paper and pencil task   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 11. Participant performs verbal or aural task (e.g. for linguistic study)                                | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 12. Focus group  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 13. Interview  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. Audio recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. Video recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. Photography of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)     | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 17. Others (please specify below)  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

<b>SECTION D: Professional guidelines and training</b>		
1. In this section, please mark 'X' against at least one of the following professional guidelines you aim to adhere to. You should use the principles listed in your chosen guideline(s) in conducting your own research. <b>Note:</b> this is not an exhaustive list.		<b>Please mark 'X'</b>
<b>Research specialism/ methodology</b>	<b>Association and guidance document</b>	
Anthropology	<a href="#">Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computer Sciences	<a href="#">ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Criminology	<a href="http://www.britisoccrim.org/ethics/">http://www.britisoccrim.org/ethics/</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education	<a href="#">British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research</a>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Geography	<a href="#">Association of American Geographers Statement on Professional Ethics</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
History	<a href="#">Oral History Society of the UK Ethical Guidelines</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internet-based Research	<a href="#">British Psychological Society: Conducting Research on the Internet</a> <a href="#">Association of Internet Researchers Ethics Guide</a> <a href="#">ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct</a> <a href="#">Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR)</a> Also see our <a href="#">Best Practice Guidance on internet-based research</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Law (Socio-Legal)	<a href="#">Socio-Legal Studies Association: Statement of Principles of Ethical Research</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Management	<a href="#">Academy of Management's Professional Code of Ethics</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Political Science	<a href="#">American Political Science Association (APSA) Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Politics	<a href="#">Political Studies Association. Guidelines for Good Professional Conduct</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Psychology	<a href="#">British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Research	<a href="#">Social Research Association: Ethical Guidelines</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sociology	<a href="#">The British Sociological Association: Statement of Ethical Practice</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visual Research	<a href="#">ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper: Visual Ethics: Ethical Issues in Visual Research</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other professional guidelines. Please specify the other guidelines used here:		<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Please indicate what training in research ethics (or research methodology) the researchers involved with this study have received, e.g. the title of the course and date completed (online training available at		

<http://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/support/training/ethics>), or discussions between researchers and supervisors, if applicable.

The topic of 'ethical research' has been covered on my MSc programme.

I have undertaken 'Academic Integrity' training offered by Epegium.

I have discussed the ethical issues with my supervisor.

**SECTION E: Signatures or email endorsements (The SSH IDREC Secretariat accepts either option below. If you have a [DREC](#), check which signature option it prefers.)**

- **Option 1:** Email confirmations from a University of Oxford email address can be accepted. Separate emails should come from each of the relevant signatories as outlined below, indicating acceptance of the relevant responsibilities. **Pasted images of signatures cannot be accepted.**
- **Option 2:** Handwritten (wet-ink) signatures. Please scan them and the rest of the checklist pages to create a single PDF document and email to us.

**Please ensure this checklist is signed by:**

For staff research:	For student research:
1. <a href="#">Principal investigator</a>	1. <a href="#">Principal investigator</a> (project supervisor)
2. <b>Head of Department (or nominee)</b>	2. <b>Head of Department (or nominee)</b>
	3. <b>Student researcher</b>

**1. Principal Investigator signature/supervisor signature (if student research)**

I understand my responsibilities as [principal investigator](#) as outlined in the CUREC glossary and guidance on the CUREC website.

I declare that the answers above accurately describe the research as presently designed, and that a new checklist will be submitted should the research design change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of CUREC 2 (involving full scrutiny by an IDREC). I will inform the relevant IDREC if I cease to be the principal investigator on this project and supply the name and contact details of my successor if appropriate.

**Signature** (or email endorsement using the above declaration): .....XXXXXXX

**Print name** (block capitals): .....XXXXXX

**Date:** .....XXXX.....

**2. Departmental endorsement signature**

I have read the research project application named above. On the basis of the information available to me, I:

- (i) consider the principal investigator to be aware of her/his ethical responsibilities in regard to this research;
- (ii) consider that any ethical issues raised have been satisfactorily resolved or are covered by relevant professional guidelines and/or CUREC approved procedures, and that it is appropriate for the research to proceed (noting the principal investigator's obligation to report should the design of the research change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of a CUREC 2 full application);
- (iii) am satisfied that: the proposed project design and scientific methodology is sound; the project has been/will be subject to appropriate [peer review](#); and is likely to contribute to existing knowledge and/or to the education and training of the researcher(s) and that it is in the [public interest](#).

**Signed by Head of Department or nominee** (example nominees for student research include the Director of Graduate Studies/ Director of Undergraduate Studies):

**Signature** (or email endorsement using the above declaration): .....

**Print name** (block capitals): .....XXXXXX.....

**Date:** .....XXXXXX.....

**3. Student signature (if student research)**

I understand the questions and answers that have been entered above describing the research, and I will ensure that my practice in this research complies with these answers, subject to any modifications made by the principal investigator properly authorised by the CUREC system.

**Signature by student** (or email endorsement using the above declaration): .....XXXXXXX.....

**Print name** (block capitals): .....XXXXXXXX.....

**Date:** .....XXXXXX



## Appendix G: ETHOS Approval Letter



14/07/2020

**Project Title:** Pastoral support for UK Higher Education students in the context of Covid19 – A case study

**EthOS Reference Number:** 24004

### **Gatekeeper Opinion**

Dear [REDACTED]

The above application was reviewed by the Research Ethics and Governance Committee as Manchester Metropolitan University Gatekeeper for research on its staff and/or students performed by external researchers and, on the 14/07/2020, has given its approval. The Gatekeeper approval is in place until the end of your approval from the University of Oxford.

### **Conditions of favourable ethical opinion**

The Research Ethics and Governance Committee favourable ethical opinion is granted with the following conditions:

Adherence to the researchers' home institution policies and procedures regarding research ethics and governance

Adherence to Manchester Metropolitan University's policies and procedures regarding research ethics and governance

### Amendments

If you obtain an amendment of the ethical approval you hold from your home institution, you will be required to inform our Committee of this fact and the changes it entails. Please send notice of any amendments to [ethics@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@mmu.ac.uk).

We wish you every success with your project.

Research Ethics and Governance Committee

For help with this application, please first contact [ethics@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@mmu.ac.uk)