



Information about the

# Student Academic Support (SAS) Project



University  
of Exeter

## Project Background:

### Inception (2022/23):

Initially, a Student Academic Support (SAS) Task and Finish Group (SAS T&FG) was stood up in March 2023 to consider our holistic institutional approach to end-to-end student academic support. The Education Student Experience Executive Committee (EdSEEC), chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Education and Student Experience, and the University Executive Board (UEB), chaired by the Vice Chancellor, approved the final recommendations of the SAS T&FG in July 2023 including the implementation of a rapid development pilot for Pastoral Mentors.

To inform and shape its recommendations, the Project Team and T&FG Group considered the findings from previous reviews of personal academic tutoring, feedback from academic and professional services staff and students, and best practice from other institutions in the UK and internationally.

“This project responds to a widely recognised need for enhanced and accessible student support across our campuses. We are really thrilled to have now reached the stage of University-wide roll-out. The impact—for students, tutors, our whole community—of having pastoral mentors embedded in departments is already clear from our pilots in Streatham and Penryn and we’re excited to see how this evolves at scale. Our pastoral mentors are there when students need them. Supported by better data, they are taking proactive steps to reach out to students before things get difficult. It’s a great model. Our project has the momentum and energy it has because it’s been a co-creation between academics, professional services colleagues, and our student community. We’re very proud to be part of it.”

**Professor Adam Watt: Co-Project Lead**

**Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (DPVC) – Faculty of (HASS)**



### Current progress (2023/24):

The SAS Project Group was stood up in 2023/24 (and the SAS T&FG stood down) to take forward implementation. Following the successful implementation of a pilot for Pastoral Mentors in Physics and HASS Cornwall (Phase 1: October 2023–March 2024), the SAS Project moved into rollout from March 2024.

“I’m both delighted and excited to see how this project is progressing. The pastoral mentors we have appointed are outstanding and dedicated student support professionals and I can already see the impact they are having in our departments. What has been most pleasing has been the enthusiasm with which other departments have come on board. Rolling out an institutional change project can be hard, and colleagues naturally had questions and concerns about the change but as soon as they’ve met and spoken to our pastoral mentors, the senior tutors in pilot departments, and heard the impact these roles are having everyone has quickly got on board and are really keen to bring this much needed dedicated student support to their departments as soon as possible.”

**Professor Nicky King: Co-Project Lead**

**(Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (APVCE) Education – Faculty of (ESE))**



## Co-created and collaborative:

“Working collaboratively with the University and the Guild on the Pastoral Mentors scheme has truly allowed me to realise the full potential of the project. The concept of a ‘third space’ between academia and well-being has removed numerous barriers to access around pastoral support. This scheme shows great promise, through supporting students through their studies, and enabling them to access all opportunities that are open to them as students at the University of Exeter. I look forward to seeing our students flourish because of it.”

**Connie Chilcott ,**

**President Exeter for Cornwall (Falmouth and Exeter Students’ Union)**



Pastoral Mentors will be recruited to all Departments by September 2025.

We are committed to ensuring that the agile approach to the phased rollout of Pastoral Mentors and the wider SAS Project pilot is both **collaborative and co-created** through regular engagement with Departments and ongoing evaluation to help iterate and improve as we implement.

Pastoral Mentors provide a bridge to wider University Support Services, and are embedded within Departments to provide a data-informed outreach approach.

You can view the **Project implementation timeline** via the [SAS SharePoint Site](#).

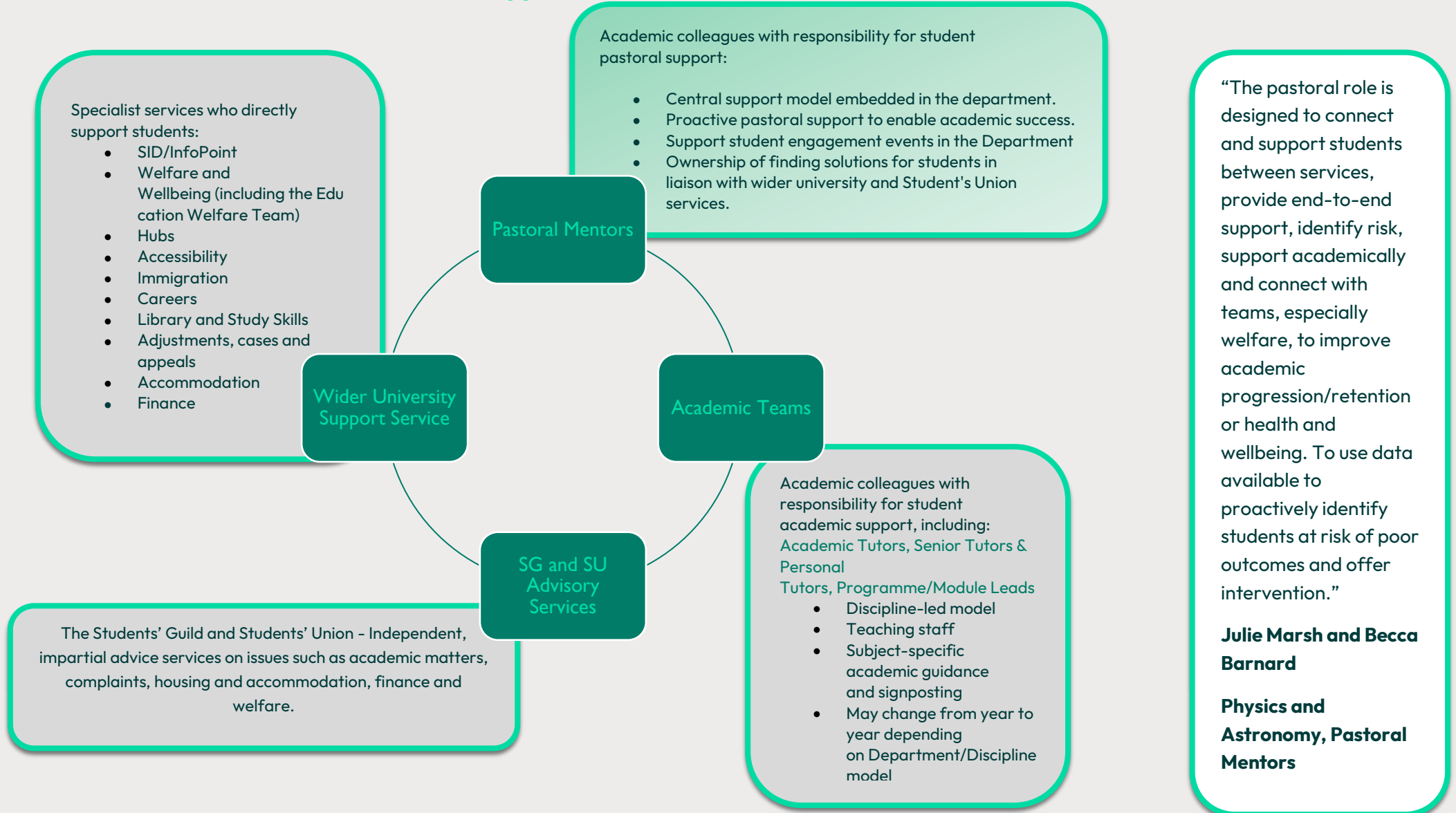
“The Pastoral Mentor scheme has the potential to be one of the most important pieces of work that the University has done. It has been great to feed in, as a student representative, to a new role that should play an important part in ensuring that pastoral support is as accessible and as far from intimidating as possible. I hope that it allows students to feel comfortable accessing support and see real improvements to their experience here in Exeter as a result.”

**Alex Stanley**

**Education Officer (University of Exeter Students’ Guild)**



## A new model for Student Academic Support:



## Benefits:

### Benefits and success measures for the pilot include:

- Pastoral Mentors proactively and consistently reach out to students to offer academic and pastoral support.
- Academic and professional services staff work collaboratively with Pastoral Mentors to support students.
- Students receive and/or are signposted to academic and pastoral support that allows them to progress in their studies.
- Students report increased satisfaction and reduced variability with their experience of academic support.
- Departments report increased student engagement, a reduction in non-continuation / withdrawal rates and improvement in student outcomes (with a focus on under-represented, disadvantaged, and international students).



"Pastoral Mentors remove the perception of an academic barrier to pastoral support which can present in a Personal Tutor/Academic Tutor model. They are embedded in Departments, and this is critical, as students can knock on their door, arrange a drop-in session, and be supported."

**Dr Pablo Loren-Aguilar**

**Physics and Astronomy, Senior Tutor**

## Workstreams:

The Project is currently working on activities across four main workstreams:

1. **Pastoral Mentors (PM):** Piloting, and now rolling out, a proactive approach to student pastoral support embedded in Departments. Find out more about the role of the Pastoral Mentor below.
3. **"Digital First" Solution:** Piloting institutional-level digital solutions to filter and answer simple queries and consolidate online information.
4. **"Data First" Solution:** Piloting institutional-level digital solutions to filter and answer simple queries and consolidate online information. We will work with the Student Connect Programme to achieve this.
4. **Academic Tutors:** Piloting different Department/Discipline-led models for student academic support.

"Pastoral Mentors are likely to provide appropriate and earlier interventions to students. They can review and interpret the data, and from this, intervene and support a student, and in some cases, before the student even realises, they may need support."

**Tim Harris**

**Education Welfare Advisor Welfare Manager**



Ways of Working (non-exhaustive):



Academic/Personal Tutor

- Provides academic advice and support to the student across the programme of study and reviews wider academic progress.
- Meets with tutees regularly throughout the year to support their transition and progress and help them to realise their ambitions.
- Works closely with Module Convenors, Senior Tutors, Education Welfare Team, and Pastoral Mentors to manage unsatisfactory engagement and/or performance.
- Can provide evidence for mitigation applications (excluding exceptional mitigation) where academic concerns are raised.
- Refers and signposts students to Pastoral Mentors for the Department where they are unsure of the support students might need and/or they have concerns in relation to academic study and success.
- Refers and signposts students to specialist support services as appropriate (e.g. wellbeing (including the Education Welfare Team), careers and professional development, etc.).



Pastoral Mentor

- Acts as a first port of call when students are not sure what academic or pastoral support they might need.
- Shares and promotes information about Pastoral Mentor support services with students and staff.
- Proactively identifies and reaches out to students who may be experiencing challenges that create barriers to academic study, wellness, and success.
- Triage and maintains oversight for students in the Department, including signposting and referring students to academic and pastoral support within and outside the Department.
- Refers and signposts students to relevant University support services (including the Education Welfare Team), and to Academic Tutors, to help with any difficulties relating to pastoral support, academic study, and success.
- Co-creates action plans related to pastoral support needs and academic interventions with staff and students to support improvement in engagement.
- Provides clear and relevant pastoral information, advice, and guidance to staff and students in the Department.
- Can provide evidence for mitigation applications (excluding exceptional mitigation) where academic and pastoral concerns are raised.
- Fosters an inclusive, supportive, and accessible academic community for all students in a Department e.g., through Departmental events, sharing of information, and proactive outreach.
- Works in collaboration with all University support teams to ensure the correct support is received and students can progress with their studies by being a central point of contact, embedded in the student's Department.



Education Welfare Team

- Shares and promotes information about Wellbeing Services' support and appointments with students and staff.
- Promotes health and wellbeing resources and activities to students through meetings and events.
- Refers and signposts students to Pastoral Mentors and/or Academic Tutors to help with any difficulties relating to wellbeing support, academic study, and success.
- Refers and signposts students to relevant University support services, and to Pastoral Mentors and/or Academic Tutors, to help with any difficulties relating to pastoral support, academic study, and success.
- Holds one-off meetings with students to provide wellbeing-focused support and interventions.
- Provides ongoing academic and wellbeing support to students throughout the Health, Wellbeing and Support for Study (HWSS) process.
- Co-creates actions plans related to academic and wellbeing-related concerns with staff and students to support students to progress with their studies or next steps.
- Helps to facilitate mitigation, repeat study, and interruption relation support where health, wellbeing and academic interventions are raised (including exceptional cases).
- Works collaboratively with internal teams, including Wellbeing Services, and Education Support Teams, and external support services to assist and advocate for students in accessing specialist support.

“The inception of Pastoral Mentors has been nothing but positive. Pastoral Mentors have the time and capacity to provide continuous pastoral support to students, which academics would not otherwise be able to do.”

**Dr William White**  
HASS Cornwall, Senior Tutor

“We use a research-led approach to continuous improvement of the student experience within our department as well as institutionally. Our focus is on identifying and engaging otherwise disengaged and disempowered students. Our role is a balance of working with students along their end-to-end journey of support whilst maintaining a strategic focus on research and analysis of engagement, success, and wellness data to identify patterns and blockers for students.”

**Hannah Lyons and Hannah Jordan**  
HASS Cornwall, Pastoral Mentors

“Pastoral Mentors represent a significant additional resource being granted to departments and as such can make a real difference to student academic support. I think the key benefits I have noted have been around the ability to monitor closely attendance and engagement and reach out to students early on to help them re-engage.”

**Alex Lewis**  
Education Welfare Manager

## Relevant links and information:

### Website:

- [Student Academic Support Webpage](#)

### All-staff SharePoint:

- [Staff SharePoint – includes list of all Pastoral Mentor names and Department referral forms](#)

### Useful Resources:

- [SAS Signposting Infographic](#)
- [Wellbeing Services](#)
- [Study Zone](#)
- [Peer Support](#)
- [Digital Hub](#)
- [Library Induction](#)
- [Guild Advice Unit](#) (Exeter)
- [FX Plus Advice](#) (Cornwall)
- [International Student Support](#)
- [Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Matrix](#)

## How to get involved/Feedback:

We encourage Departments to reach out if they have any questions about the implementation of Pastoral Mentors, and the wider SAS project.

We also welcome all feedback, as this will help us to evaluate and evolve our student support model in a co-created and collaborative way.

Please contact: [StudentAcademicSupportProject@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:StudentAcademicSupportProject@exeter.ac.uk)

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