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# Co-Tutor: A Relationship Management System to Enable Staff to Monitor Students Engagement and Provide support to 'At-Risk Students

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## Keywords

Monitoring Engagement:  
Institutional Data:  
At-Risk Students:  
Staff-Student Interaction

## Nature of Intervention

Using learner analytics and targeted tutor intervention to support the retention and progression of students, enhancing the learner experience and building quality tutor/student relationships.

## Focus of Intervention

The intervention is Academic and aimed at both enhancing the student experience and improving practice.

## Description of Intervention

Loughborough University has high rates of student satisfaction, retention and completion. This can be attributed at least in part to the relationships students build up with their tutors, supervisors and professional services staff. Pastoral care, effective attendance monitoring and timely advice and guidance from academic and support professionals, play a vital role in helping to build and support these relationships. The effective management of these processes across the institution is critical in delivering a consistent and high quality experience for all students.

The Centre for Engineering and Design Education - formerly the Engineering Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (engCETL) - has collaboratively developed a

relationship management system, called Co-Tutor, to track student engagement in learning, to identify at risk students and manage staff/student interaction which used across the University.

Co-Tutor is a student and staff relationship management system. It is used by academic staff and administrators to communicate with and manage students, including personal tutees, project students, industrial placement activities, postgraduate research supervision and course cohorts. Co-Tutor allows staff to undertake a range of functions in relation to specific groups of students or individuals, such as view students' personal information, attendance and course marks; organise groups, email groups and schedule meetings; and upload additional information and add comments. It automatically gives permission to staff access to student-data based on their role within the department or institution. Thus, it enables staff to view a wide range of information to monitor students' attendance and progress, inform decision-making and organise interventions to improve student retention and progression for students who are identified as being at risk. For example, students with less than 50% attendance are automatically flagged to the tutor, and then the tutor can access other information about the student and decide how to act. Tutors log all their communications, comments and actions. This allows managers to be sure that all students are receiving suitable levels of pastoral care and academic support. In addition, this reinforces the personal responsibility members of staff have for supporting and guiding their students, and providing high quality information and advice.

In summary, Co-Tutor provides staff with a system that integrates institutional data and external sources of information in order to make better-informed decisions of 'at risk' students and help the progression of all students. It supports a pro-active interventionist approach so that an effective and supportive relationship between staff and students is built up.

### **How the Intervention Engages Students**

A recent study by the Centre for the JISC funded Pedestal for Progression project (<http://progression.lboro.ac.uk>) involved using a Service Design approach to solicit the views and experiences from the current student body. From the vast collection of user experiences gathered during the discovery phase and knowledge of the existing data collected on students, potential solutions areas for enhancing student progression were identified and arranged into the following themes:

1. Improving the capability to time manage – easy access calendar (thought in terms of student experience as no conflicting demands of coursework/ project deadlines)
2. Easy access to knowledgeable, better briefed, personal tutors (who know students' better) and other support staff
3. More help with employability and support for progression beyond study
4. Possible Opportunities for students to have mentoring mentors scheme in their final year

5. Access to library resources
6. Active staff - students being asked if they need more help, or to be re-assured about progress or to be contacted if seen to be struggling.

From this research, recommendations for new initiatives were made to various departments within the Institution and in particular to developments to Co-tutor initiated.

Processes were designed with personal tutors to look at the current use of attendance data and how a mixture of new automated notices could be sent via email to students and the relevant member of staff to highlight non-attendance. Changes to the way the registers were set up allowed each session to be recorded as 'critical' or not and also allowed a reason for absence to be recorded so more specific emails could be sent to those students who were missing critical sessions only. It was also felt important that students could access their own attendance data and be pro-active about seeing and addressing their own change in patterns of attendance.

### [Link to the What Works Conceptual Model & Findings](#)

Co-Tutor provides staff with information and data to assist them to monitor student engagement through attendance and performance; which is supported by other institutional data. If students have low levels of engagement this is flagged up, and staff can they take actions to proactively engage with students, particularly those at risk of withdrawing or under-achieving. This supports the project findings that identifying programmes, modules, student groups and individual students at risk of withdrawing is a key role that institutions should undertake, and then take follow up action. This facilitates staff capacity to identify at risk students and communicate and engage with them.

Co-Tutor was developed in engineering, but the institution-wide adoption of Co-Tutor demonstrates the institutional commitment to student engagement and the development of relationships between staff and students. Furthermore, it encourages individual staff responsibility for the engagement and success of their students.

The generation of reports allows managers to monitor staff engagement, and thus promotes staff accountability. This may have a range of benefits that go beyond the scope of Co-Tutor, as staff see a direct relationship between their activities and the outcomes of the student cohorts they are responsible for.

### [Evidence of Effectiveness / Impact](#)

By promoting staff responsibility and facilitating good communications and relationship building with students, it is believed that Co-Tutor has contributed to improving student attendance, engagement and success in higher education. Its impact is demonstrated by the

changes in students' behaviour in terms of attendance, as a result of staff use of information and follow up action.

Data from the past 5 years attendance records suggests that the act of taking registers potentially has the effect of increasing attendance rates. The number of modules monitoring attendance has increased from 62 to 260, and the average attendance rate has increased to 66% to 70%.

The data also shows a correlation between attendance averages and final degree classifications. 31% of people who achieved a first class degree attended teaching sessions more than 91% of the time, compared to 26% of people with a 2i, 11% of people with a 2ii and only 8% of people with a third. People graduating with a first and a 2i are most likely to attend more than 91% of the time, people with a 2ii tend to attend between 71 and 80% of the time, and people with a third are most likely to attend between 61 and 70% of the time. In addition, the data demonstrates that students achieving a first class degree have consistently attended at a higher rate than other students. It also suggests that by intervention by staff to increase student attendance can improve degree outcomes for students.

A survey Co-Tutor staff users suggests five key reasons why Co-Tutor impacts on engagement, retention and achievement: In sum, Co-Tutor:

1. Provides flexibility and continuity to support a student's learning journey:
  - 86% (55/64) reported a positive effect on the continuity of care from a student's previous tutors: 6% (4/64) reported a dramatic improvement.
2. Helps the identification and monitoring of struggling students to aid retention and improve performance
  - 89% (55/62) reported a positive effect on aiding intervention and early recognition of struggling students: 13% (8/62) reported a dramatic improvement.
3. Assists staff in their responsibilities and improves communication
  - 85% (51/60) reported a positive effect on communication between various tutors and administrator: 10% (6/60) reported a dramatic improvement: 84% (47/56) agreed or strongly agreed it helps new members of staff in their tutoring roles.
4. Provides important metrics to help enhance the student experience:
5. 77% (41/53) either agreed or strongly agreed that it helped to provide consistent pastoral care and industrial supervision across the department:
6. Supportive and inclusive development process based on departmental and academic need:
  - 77% (20/26) agreed that the method of developers working closely with staff created a more useful, flexible and innovative system.

## **Website**

<http://co-tutor.lboro.ac.uk/about.php>