

A top-down view of a wooden desk. In the top left is a small black pot with green grass-like plants. To its right is a white computer keyboard. Below the keyboard are two black paper clips. In the bottom right is a white ceramic cup. In the bottom center is a black notebook with a pen resting on it. The background is a light brown wooden surface.

Student Experiences of Academic Advising on a Large-Cohort Undergraduate Programme

JESS LEATHER, SHUBHI KOHLI & BECKY CHAMPION

DORON COHEN, LIZ MCMANUS-DAY, RUTH INGRAM, AMBER RUIGROK,
LEONE BUCKLE

DIVISION OF PSYCHOLOGY AND MENTAL HEALTH, SCHOOL OF HEALTH SCIENCES

Background

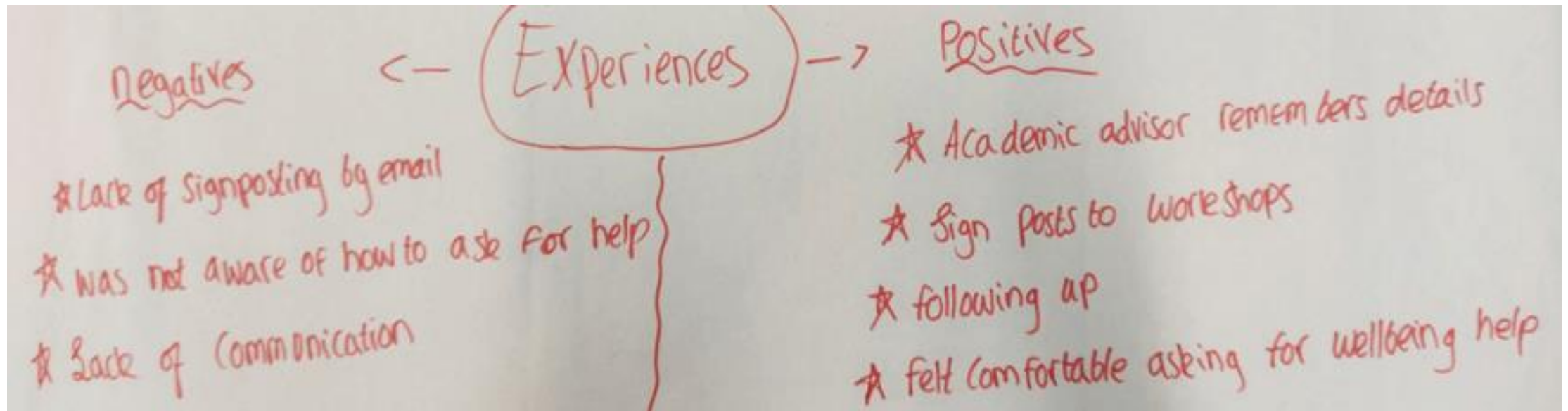
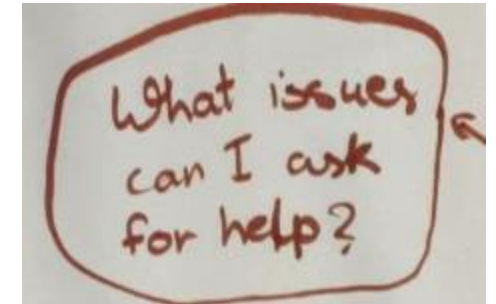
- BSc. Psychology is a large UG programme in SHS (24/25 Full cohort = 1042 students)
- In Years 1 and 2 students have the same Academic Advisor with min. 2 meetings per semester.
- In Final-Year students change academic advisor with the final-year project supervisor also taking the role of academic advisor. Students have min. 1 academic advisor meeting per semester plus additional project supervision meetings.
- BSc. Psychology Academic Advisors follow the UoM Academic Advising Model which supports advisees to discuss, prioritise, implement and reflect on their personal development.
- The aim of this project was to understand how effective the Academic Advising system is in supporting students on the BSc Psychology and what could be done to improve this support.

Approach

- Co-designed, student-led consultation group (n = 7)
- Online survey (n = 55)
- Follow-up, student-led focus groups with Y1 (n = 5) and Y2 (n = 7) students
- Interviews with Y3 students (n = 6)

Student-led consultation workshop

- Students shared experiences of academic advising
- Generated initial questions for survey
- Survey questions then refined by staff



Survey data: Demographic information

N= 55		n	%
Year of study			
	Year 1	27	49
	Year 2	20	36
	Final year	8	15
DASS			
	Yes	14	25
	No	34	62
	Did not answer	7	13
International			
	Yes	14	25
	No	32	58
	Did not answer	9	16
WP background			
	Yes	12	22
	No	34	62
	Prefer not to say	9	16

What do you think the purpose of having an academic advisor is?

Overall comments showed a good understanding of academic advising:

"To plan future careers/ education, to ask any questions not specific to modules"

"To have a key point of contact to ensure you are on track academically as well as regarding your wellbeing"

"Someone to set goals with and who checks in on you sometimes"

"checking in with you so u dont slip through the cracks "



Personal goals: Goal setting was beneficial

Does your academic advisor help you to set personal goals? (N= 55)

Yes: 58%

I don't know: 18%

No: 24%

If yes, *do* you find setting personal goals helpful? (N = 40)

Yes: 68%

No: 7%

I don't know: 25%

If no, *would* you find it helpful to set personal goals? (N =13)

Yes: 62%

No: 15%

I don't know: 23%

Do you find setting personal goals helpful?

Explain why/why not

Yes

Allows you to work towards goals and set plans rather than guessing

Gives me a sense of direction and awareness of what my goals are

I makes me challenge myself and cause change, otherwise I wouldn't change - because I wouldn't know what I need to do

Keeps me motivated

Useful to know where I'm at ...[an] expected goal makes everything easier

No/ I don't know

I don't think they ever end up being very relevant and if I don't complete them, I just lie

We did not have enough time to do so. I can't explain all my goals in <20 minutes

I see the logic in it, however, especially during first year at university you have so much commotion in your life that sometimes adding more targets for yourself to reach adds to the feeling of "everything is impossible"

Experiences of advising

Do your meetings cover these three key topics: academic progress, future plans, and wellbeing? (N= 51)

Yes: 82%, No: 12%, I'm not sure: 6%

Do you feel supported by your Academic Advisor? (N= 52)

Yes: 63%, No: 10%, Sometimes: 27%

Do you attend all arranged meetings with your Academic Advisor? (N= 52)

Yes: 88%, No: 4%, Sometimes: 8%

What has prevented students from attending arranged meetings?

Feeling unseen and unsupported

illness

Lack of organisation on both mine and their side, also I didn't click with my first academic advisor so I didn't really want to go to the meetings

No arranged meetings

I attend most meetings with my supervisor about my dissertation. We don't have any planned meetings for other things. I think i would have to reach out for a meeting, however, i don't know if i would feel comfortable doing this.

"What one thing would you want to improve about academic advising?"

- Students want flexibility in approaches to advising
- Described some issues that are outside of the AA role
- Highlights need to help students understand the boundaries of the role & locate appropriate sources of support

More email contact not in person or zoom meeting

have our meetings in person as i feel it would be more personal and more conversational... online feels a bit broken up

Being able to actually help me with my work and improving grades

More of a tailored approach when helping us with assignments

Being able to talk more openly with students and offer more advice and support rather than only signposting other resources

It would be good if they could set meetings for me like with the careers service because then that would be a reason to go rather than putting off making the meeting myself

Key Findings: Focus groups/Interviews

- Most students understand the **purpose** of academic advising
- Few students use **Student Action Sheet**, but those that *do* like it!
- Generally satisfied with the **amount of contact** and **optionality** (email, in-person & online meetings)
- Students who felt they needed more support from their AA found **advisors were responsive** to requests for help
- **Language barriers** can prevent help-seeking, particularly via **email**
- **DASS** students are vulnerable to cycles of isolation, shame & pressure (i.e.: non-attendance, not reaching agreed advising goals)

Key Findings: Y1 & Y2 Focus groups

- **Terminology:** some students surprised that AAs aren't only for academic support
- First meeting crucial to set expectations
 - Follow-up info via email (essential for students who arrive late)
 - Clarity about **what** students can ask for help with (boundaries)
 - Clear instructions about **how/when** to contact AAs
- Students have anxiety about **burdening** AAs by requesting meeting/help
- Students need reassurance that AA **goals** are flexible and for their personal development, not 'just another deadline'
- Student appetite to meet 'as a group' again after Welcome Week

Key Findings: Y1 & Y2 Focus groups

- Students liked building **rappor**t over time; feel comfortable in Y2
- **Career** becomes priority in Y2 (placement, references, etc); meetings feel more purpose-driven
 - Y2 students reflected that career discussions in Y1 felt overwhelming, and seem to miss opportunities to engage in professionalism at Y1
- Students at the end of Y2 feel anxious about '**starting over**' with a new member of staff
 - Liked consistent AA at points of transition (i.e.: coming to university, between Y1 and Y2)

Key Findings: Final Year Interviews

- Students had **mixed experiences** of advising in final year
- Some issues with the dual advisor/supervisor role were highlighted
 - Some students had no 'advising' discussions with their supervisor at all
 - Some students had brief chats attached to project meetings
- Students who experience **difficulties** with their supervisor have no advisor to turn to, rely on Year Tutors and peers
- Want **clear expectations** of support & role boundaries to ensure they know how to get help
- Appetite for more structured wellbeing/progression/careers discussions in final year

Next steps

- Clear communications about academic advising in first year
 - Particularly about signposting
- Flexibility and clarity about mode of attendance for meetings
- Ensure consistency in approach to personal goal-setting
- Re-think final year: ensure students get adequate support