



INSIGHT

learning • sharing • enabling

The impact on engagement and retention of Student Support and Guidance Tutors (SSGTs) in the School of Architecture at University of Brighton

University of Brighton



AMOSSHE

The Student Services Organisation



University of Brighton

Contents

A report into the impact of the work of the Student Support and Guidance Tutor in the Architecture department at the University of Brighton, particularly with reference to student engagement and retention.....	2
Overview of project.....	2
Background to development of SSGTs.....	2
Overview of the role.....	4
Reasons for undertaking project and methods used.....	5
Overview of department of Architecture.....	5
Reasons for visits to SSGT.....	6
Findings from NSS.....	7
Findings from the Students' Union.....	8
Findings from alumni.....	8
Findings from stakeholders.....	9
Counselling and welfare.....	9
Disability Team.....	10
Mental Health Support.....	10
Findings from student surveys.....	11
Key findings from student surveys.....	14
Findings from staff survey.....	14
Key findings from staff surveys.....	15
Student focus groups.....	16
Focus group analysis.....	16
Focus group questions.....	16
Key findings from student focus groups.....	17
Conclusions and recommendations.....	18
Conclusions.....	18
Recommendations.....	18

A report into the impact of the work of the Student Support and Guidance Tutor in the Architecture department at the University of Brighton, particularly with reference to student engagement and retention

Justine Devenney and Clare Hughes, University of Brighton.

Overview of project

The aim of the project is to ascertain the impact of the work of Student Support and Guidance Tutors (SSGTs) in the Architecture Department at the University of Brighton, particularly with reference to student engagement and retention.

Background to development of SSGTs

The University of Brighton (UoB) is a university on the south coast, with roughly 23,000 students studying mainly professional courses on 5 campuses including those at Eastbourne and Hastings. We are in the process of a major reorganisation at the moment but currently have five faculties and 12 schools in addition to our Doctoral College. There is a thriving Student Services department, which includes:

- Disability Support Service
- Student advice service
- Counselling service
- Chaplaincy
- Careers
- Student Volunteering Scheme
- Nurseries

and has offices on every site.

The main concept behind the role of SSGT is to bridge the gap between students and academic staff in schools and student services, and as a consequence enhance student retention and engagement. SSGTs are based directly in schools and ideally located in rooms, which are close to the centre of the hub of the school. They are not specialists but all have backgrounds that reflect their role of supporting students. They work with students on a 1-1 basis to help with a huge range of often complex issues, but will signpost students to more specialist services where appropriate and

support them on the journey to accessing this support. In the main they are managed by a manager within Student Services but have a strong link and identity with the culture in schools.

Two years ago there was a very fragmented picture with regard to SSGTs at UoB. There had been a previous attempt to consolidate the role in schools but a number of schools had no one in post and there was no co-ordination of the work across the institution. Data was showing that retention across the university was poor in some areas and concerted high level initiatives were started to rectify this situation. A team of staff was established to look at this issue (Student Retention improvement Team - SRIT) and a range of initiatives were put in place to be actioned. A decision was made to expand the role of the SSGTs across the university with a view to them being well located in schools to work with students to enhance engagement and as a consequence improve retention. Research had been undertaken around the area of retention and the publication of the 'What works?' report on student retention and success, Thomas (2012)¹ was timely, as findings from this report focused on initiatives to help enhance retention and '*recognise the importance of nurturing a culture of belonging*'.

It was felt that the role was needed as there was evidence that some students were not accessing Student Services till towards the end of their time with us, and therefore support was not in place despite the efforts of the Student services teams. There was no cohesive way of monitoring students and students who had issues of a pastoral nature that were impinging on their ability to study, often felt they had nowhere to 'take' these issues.

To start the process the role of manager was established recruited and a job description was drawn up for the role of SSGT. It was felt that an important element of the project was that it would be beneficial to have a key person within the school to be part of the recruitment process and to act as a link into the school for the SSGT who would be managed within student services. The 'What Works' report had highlighted that '*the academic sphere is the most important site for nurturing participation of the type which engenders a sense of belonging*' and by ensuring that both academic and support staff were part of the recruitment process it was hoped that partnership working could be set in place. Discussions were held with heads of schools on an individual basis and most wanted to be part of the developments and saw the value for their students. We had a named academic to work with and this link has proved invaluable in ensuring the role of SSGT is consolidated. There was a huge response to the ads for the posts for the new SSGTs (almost 200 applications) and a complex interview process undertaken to employ seven new SSGTs. In addition most of the existing SSGTs had transference of line management and are now part of a cross-university team managed within Student services.

¹Thomas (2012) http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/retention/what_works_final_report.pdf

Overview of the role

Each school within the university has a degree of autonomy and there are differing cultures and ways of working in each school which impacts on the work that SSGTs can do. Tasks they undertake vary but can include:

- Attendance at Open Days – to advise students and parents about support available
- Work to engage students pre-entry – Facebook plays a part and SSGTs work to ensure documentation sent to schools includes mention of their role
- Being aware of Widening Participation students and those who are coming in through clearing to ensure contact is made to enhance engagement
- Play an integral role in Welcome week and in induction activities. All students within schools to be given an introduction to the role
- Being part of engagement activities during Refreshers week (week in November with the aim of re-introducing students to wider UoB activities)
- Play a role in attendance monitoring and most importantly in following up student non-attendance
- Signpost students to Student Services to ensure disability, financial support etc. is put in place. Ensure students who need counselling sessions are encouraged to engage with the service. Work with Student Services offices to 'project manage' complex cases where necessary.
- Using social media to liaise with and inform students at pre-entry stage to help foster a sense of 'belonging'
- Help with Mitigating Circumstances procedures – to clarify and streamline process for students and ensure students with on-going issues are directed to appropriate support
- Play a role in the implementation of 'reasonable adjustments' for students with a disability that have been recommended by Disability Team members
- Work to enhance engagement and retention with vulnerable groups according to the needs of students in the school, e.g. international students, mature students, part-time students
- Run or facilitate bespoke support sessions for individual groups. Collaborative work with Student Services - Using data to target where intervention is needed to help retention and engagement.
- Some SSGTs are involved with the PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) scheme.

SSGTS are managed within Student Services but in addition have a member of the academic team who is the link in the school and regular meetings are held where ever possible. This link has helped to ensure that the role is given a high profile in schools and that there is a link for the exchange of information. We are working towards common reporting methods with all SSGTs collecting the same data with regard to the nature of referrals, details of students seen, etc. which will be reported at school level. The information collected in these reports should feed into planning for developments within the school and possibly the wider university community. A piece of work undertaken by an SSGT within the Faculty of Engineering in which he

consulted with mature students and fed back as to their particular needs is helping to change practice with regard to the requirements of this particular group of students.

Reasons for undertaking project and methods used

We wanted to impact assess the role as there is a general consensus that the scheme is 'working' across the university and has a high profile but it would be useful to have some evidence of the impact of SSGT post in schools. We are still at a very early stage in the development of the role but felt it would be helpful to look in to how it is seen from a range of perspectives to give us evidence to allow for further developments. The role of SSGTs does impact on other services across the university and research into that impact would allow us to build on any perceived good practice and enhance any areas of concern. Any impact on engagement and retention of students could be assessed and most importantly the impact of the provision of the role from the students perspective.

In order to complete this piece of work we undertook the following exercises:

- Looking at data from National Student Survey (NSS)
- Information from and consultation with the Students' Union
- Obtained information from alumni
- Information from and consultation with stakeholders to include:
 - Disability team members
 - Member of counselling team
- Consultation with and data from the Strategic Planning Office
- Focus groups with students
- Information gathering exercise (questionnaires with staff and students)

Overview of department of Architecture

We decided to look at the role of the SSGT within the Architecture department at UoB. The department is part of the school of Arts Design and Media. It is located separately from the main Arts and Design school and though the department is part of the school its geographical position (about a mile away) puts it apart from other courses. Other courses on the campus include Business, Engineering, and Sciences and the Architecture students see themselves as a very separate group and the culture within the Department is different from others on the site.

There are 543 students in the department.

There had not been a separate SSGT in the school until summer 2013 when Justine Devenney (JD) was appointed on .5, which was increased to .9 during the year and had now been increased to a permanent .9 contract due to the impact of her work.

Since JD has been in-post as SSGT, she has seen 222 different students, meaning she has now seen 40.6% of the entire department. 145 of these are home/EU students and 87 international students.

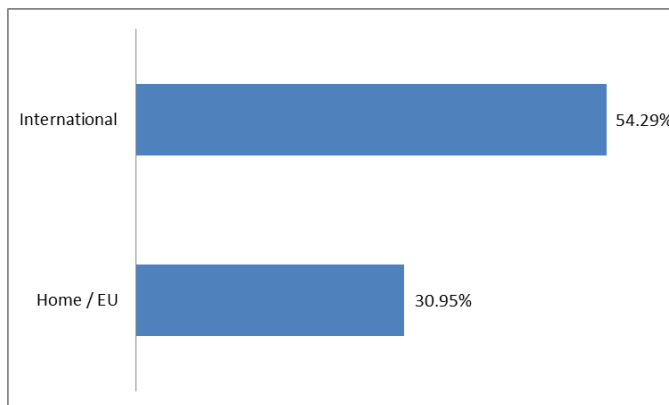
47% are from Architecture (106 students)

37% are from Interiors (82 students)

16% are MA students (34 students)

Although J has seen numerically more home students than international (145 vs. 87), proportionately, the percentage of international students who have been to see JD is far greater than the percentage of home students who have done the same.

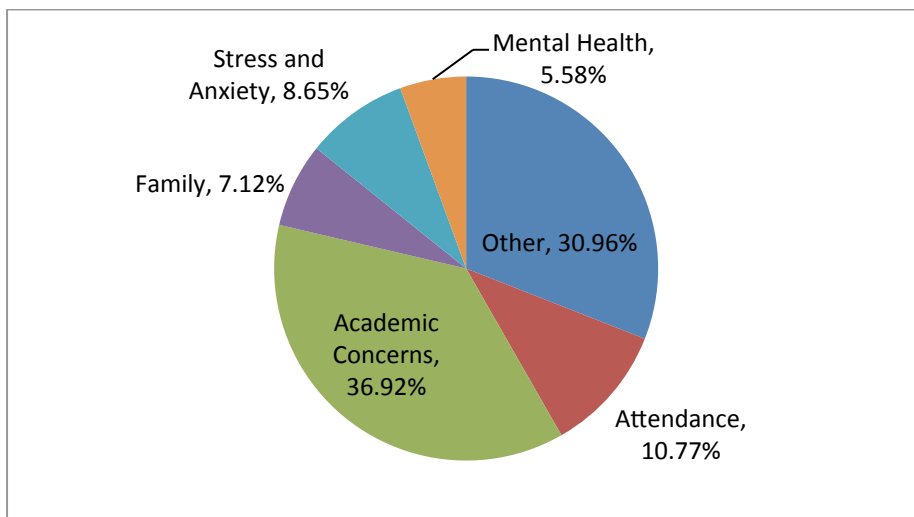
Table showing percentage of home and international students across all courses who have visited the SSGT since in-post



Reasons for visits to SSGT

Whilst in post, JD has seen students for a wide range of reasons, with 126 unique reasons being quoted (520 reasons total including duplicates from 222 students).

To give an idea of the most common reasons, the majority (approx. 70%) fall into one of five categories: attendance, academic concerns, family issues, stress and anxiety, or mental health.



Most people see SSGT for multiple or complex reasons, with less than **17%** of visits being so straight forward that they involve only one reason and only one resulting action.

Although we have chosen to study the Impact of SSGTs in the department of Architecture it is hoped that our findings will be useful in helping us highlight good practice, which will also be of use to in other areas of the university.

Findings from NSS

The most recent NSS survey presented a mixed picture with regard to the experience for students studying Architecture. There was recognition from many students of the expertise of staff and the breadth of the experience that they were undergoing. However there were some areas of concern which are highlighted below:

- Some tutors remote and not enough help given
- Some aspects of course disorganised
- Some problems for students with dyslexia - feel tutors do not understand
- Notices about changes of rooms etc. not always shared
- More positive and constructive feedback needed
- Little time for individual teaching
- Emails - last minute

Evidence from our research has shown that the provision of an SSGT is going some way towards rectifying some of these areas of concern:

- A consistent service for students has helped with the issues of inconsistent levels of support. Our survey proved that students feel it is very helpful to have someone who is always there for help with personal issues. One Architecture student wrote - *'sometimes you just need to talk to someone who doesn't really know you, can't judge you and can't be biased towards you'*.
- Tutors' responses to the survey showed that the provision of an SSGT enables them to spend more time on academic issues and course organisation. One staff member wrote *'this has greatly reduced the amount of time that teaching staff were taking away from purely academic matters. It has also significantly reduced the time that academic staff spend chasing students who are not attending regularly. Staff are now confident that appropriate pastoral support can be available for students'*.
- JD's knowledge which was gained from spending time with students led her to appreciate that there was an issue around the perception of how dyslexia affects students. Meetings between Architecture staff and a dyslexia specialist from the Disability team were arranged which has helped understanding and established an on-going dialogue. Students are guided through the process for accessing support and it is therefore established in a more timely fashion.
- SSGT has been able to ensure students are aware of Study Skill sessions.
- The SSGT can often act as an intermediary between staff and students to help with advice on practical arrangements.

Findings from the Students' Union

Members of the Students' Union (both employees and student officers) have acknowledged the development of the SSGT role as beneficial for students. There is evidence of SU officers referring students to SSGTs (e.g. if the student has school-specific needs, or when other support avenues have been exhausted), and of SSGTs referring students to the SU mainly for help with advocacy or disciplinary reasons. Records show that there have been slightly more students accessing the services of the SU this academic year as yet and that half of the cases have been around help with academic misconduct.

At a meeting held with SU reps they were aware that the two main issues that Architecture and Interior Architecture students brought to their advice services were:

- Lack of understanding for students with dyslexia.
- Concerns about stress with regard to 'crits' and presentations.

As described above JD has been working with a SpLD specialist to increase understanding of the needs of students with dyslexia. She has been able to liaise on behalf of some students who have anxiety with regard to crits and there are plans to work more closely with wellbeing officers to offer targeted 'Anxiety workshops' to appropriate groups.

Findings from alumni

The following dialogue occurred on WhatsApp - the student recently graduated with a degree in architecture:

Interior Architecture Group chat of recent graduates

Graduate student 1:

[Sent an image attachment of a photo with the newly introduced IA/Architecture SSGT's office sign]

Graduate student 2:

Really???

Graduate student 3:

What???

Graduate student 2:

Since when has there been student support!???

That would have been very handy!

Graduate student 1:

When you are stressed you can find her to talk to her

Graduate student 2:

That is so unfair, that we did not get this when we were studying!

Graduate student 4:

Yeah, she sorts out everything.

Graduate student 5:

Can't believe they did not think of this earlier!

Graduate student 6:

["Thumbs up"] 

Findings from stakeholders

Counselling and welfare

	2012/13	2013/14 (to March)
Number of Architecture students accessing counselling	50	47
More than one session	32	21
Presenting problems:		
• Anxiety	14	19
• Academic	16	9
• Depression	2	6
• Relationships	3	1
Main underlying issues:		
• Anxiety	14	8
• Academic	10	4
• Depression	7	5
• Relationships	10	7
• Self esteem	11	6

Main points from this data

Traditionally, students from within the Department accessed counselling at the end of the academic year - usually as a result of stress around final projects. The above data seems to show that since there was an SSGT in place there has been a proportionally higher number of students accessing the service, but it is too early in the term to ascertain as to whether there will be a 'last minute' increase in the number of appointments. The student survey highlighted only three students who

said they would use the counselling service as a means of support if they were feeling at risk prior to JD being in place and it is likely that the higher number of students seeking support has been increased due to her referrals. It is significant that there are fewer students accessing the counselling service due to academic reasons. It is evident that the students now have somewhere to take these issues within the school (either to the SSGT or to tutors who now have more time for them as individuals).

Disability Team

It is evident from information from the SU and the NSS survey that there is a lack of understanding of the impact of dyslexia on students within the department. Students felt that staff did not fully appreciate what the impact can be and as a consequence were reluctant to self-refer to the dyslexia team and those who did so often left it to the end of their time with us. Students who receive help and who are in receipt of the DSA are less likely to withdraw from University of Brighton. It was also evident that there was not a full understanding of the complexities experienced by students studying architecture by the dyslexia practitioners. This fact was evident to the SSGT who has instigated sessions between a dyslexia practitioner and academics within the department to enhance communication and understanding of the specific needs of students with dyslexia. There has also been an increase in students coming forward for assessment. The result of bringing two sides together was very positive and included more understanding from academics as to the different ways in which dyslexia manifests itself and more understanding of the course requirements for disability staff. The following were agreed actions:

- A 'compulsory' dyslexia awareness raising session within context of architecture/interior architecture session for all staff
- To develop a diagnostic tool so we can identify students much earlier/Induction week activity
- Termly meeting with the dyslexia specialist, course leaders and J to discuss Support plans and adjustments for specific students
- An awareness-raising session for first year students.

Mental Health Support

It is well documented that student stress has been steadily increasing over recent years and this year the Office for National Statistics² revealed that student suicides have risen by almost 50% in the past five years. So it is no surprise that the most common student issue the SSGT has dealt with across all levels has been stress and anxiety, with a worryingly high number of students experiencing severe panic attacks during assessment. Moreover the SSGT has found that a significant number of students are being prescribed medication to help them manage the day-to-day reality of their studies.

It is well known that Architecture (like Medicine) places another layer of stress and rigor on its students. The studio environment is pressured and assessment

² Office for National Statistics Measuring National Well-being - Young People's Well-being, March 2014

methods such as crits, presentations and peer reviews cause even the most gifted students a huge amount of anxiety.

Being able to see the SSGT when anxiety first emerges can be hugely beneficial. It can prevent problems from becoming worse and students know from the outset that when things get tough either in or outside of university there is someone to turn to.

Feedback from both student surveys and focus groups showed that the majority of students feel that being highly stressed and anxious was just part of the culture. You just have to accept it. As such many are reluctant to seek counselling but to many it is not the answer.

As one student reported: *'counselling can help you work out why you feel the way you do but not how to deal with the demands of the course. The SSGT support is more pragmatic – deals with the 'how' rather than the 'why'.*

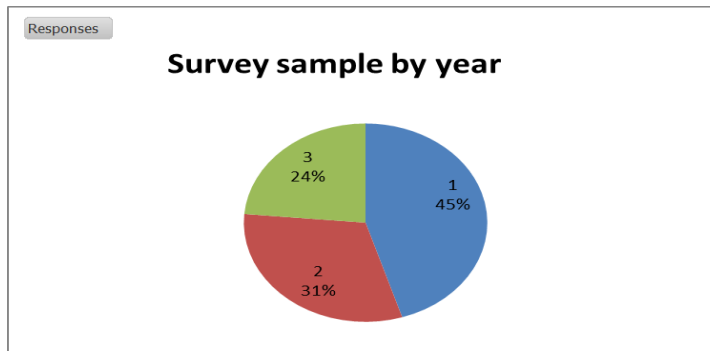
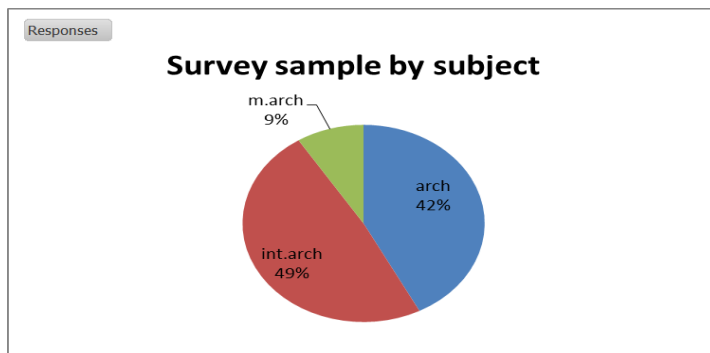
Now the SSGT has been in post for a full academic year there is an emerging picture that just having someone to calm you down and talk you through things can be enormously beneficial. As one student said *'someone to keep me on track'.*

Moreover the SSGT role is well placed to signpost and help students with study skills – in this respect a little personalised help can go a long way to reducing anxiety and improving confidence. The message the SSGT is trying to get across to students is that whilst some stress and worry can be a valuable learning experience – extreme anxiety and lack of confidence can be avoided just by getting support.

Findings from student surveys

Paper copies of the survey were distributed to students within the department. It was intended to give the survey to students from all year groups to get a picture of things since JD has been in post and prior to her appointment. We were pleased with the response rate from students

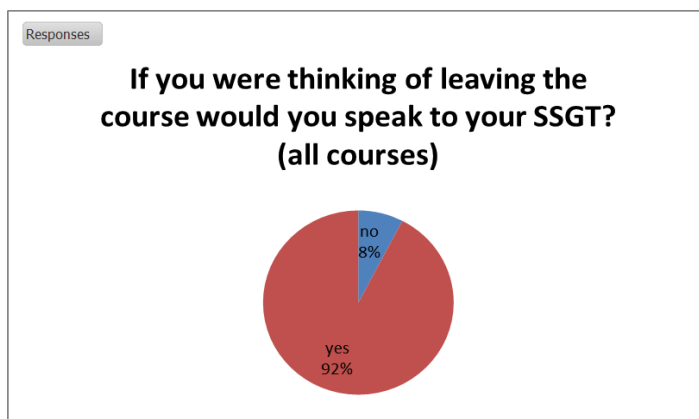
Course	Number of responses	Approx. percentage
MArch	13	32.5
Architecture	70	25.9
Interior Architecture	61	40.6
Total	144	



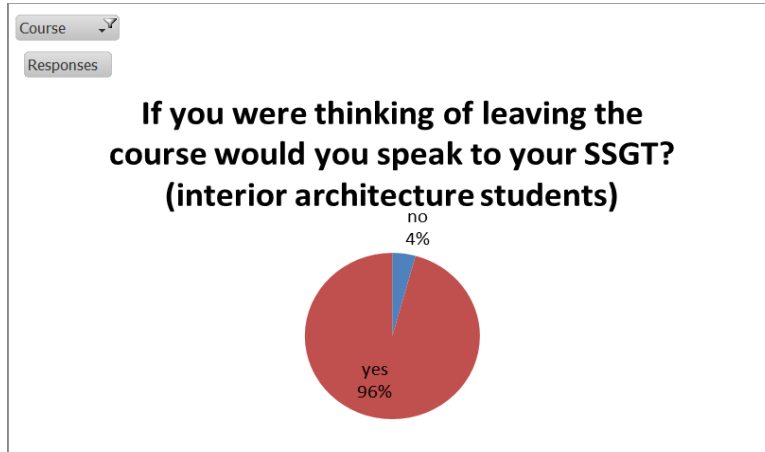
A high percentage of students are aware of the SSGT and know how to access support. We felt it was very interesting that the percentage was lower for students who are studying Architecture compared to Interior Architecture. JD's office is located in the Interior Architecture section of the department thus making her easily accessible and her profile higher evident. This shows that students are more likely to access support if it is in a geographical position that is 'on their patch', confirming the findings of the 'What Works' report that students relate to interventions within their direct academic area.

A number of students who had not accessed support themselves did feel very positively about the service as a result of the support their friends received. This is impacting on referrals to JD and peer recommendations are increasing.

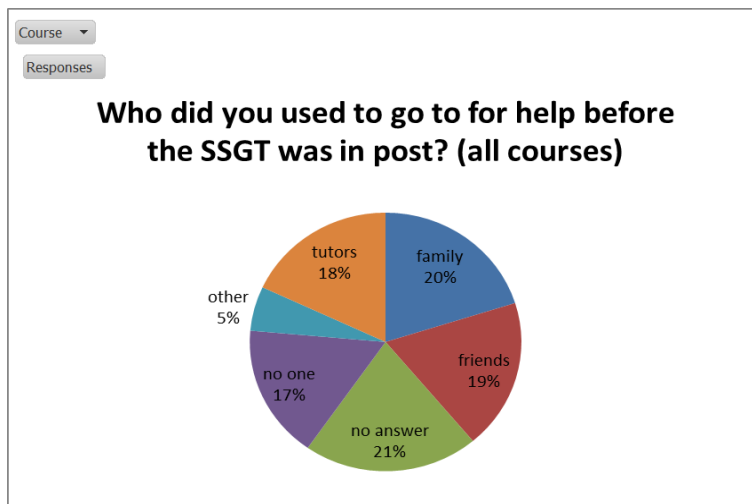
Over 92% of students reported that they would seek the help of the SSGT if they were thinking of leaving the course –and as 25% of students said they felt there was no one to talk to prior to the SSGT being in post the impact on the retention rate is clear.



The chart below shows that almost all interior architecture students would contact the SSGT if they were considering withdrawing from the university. Thus highlighting the fact that there is a good understanding of the work that she does and how it can help.



As the chart shows students sought support from a range of different sources and of those who did seek support, help from friends and family was very evident. It was interesting to note that very few students mentioned Student Services as a place to go for help.



A high percentage of students felt that it was crucial to have someone to help with issues who was part of the school but who was not an academic and not involved in assessing work.

Student comments:

'Everything can be fairly treated without the academic results be affected'

'There are some problems I find difficult to share with tutors'

'It is comforting to know that there is somebody here who specialises in that field and I would feel much readier to approach the SSGT than an academic tutor'

'It is great to be able to talk to someone who is not your tutor, but still has a grasp of what your course feels like'

Almost every student felt it was an essential role:

'It is a stressful course and extra support is needed especially when outside circumstances interfere'

Key findings from student surveys

- High percentage of students know how to access support SSGT.
- Location of the room is key to engagement with the service.
- Very high percentage of students declared they would contact SSGT if they were considering leaving the course.
- Support before the arrival of the SSGT was fragmented.
- Little engagement with Student Services - thought of as being separate from student's environments.

Findings from staff survey

24 responses.

Do you know how to refer students to SSGT?

- 21 yes
- 3 not sure

Are you aware of what the role involves?

- 22 yes
- 2 not sure

How important is the role within the department?

- 23 essential
- 1 important

The results of the survey show that staff are aware of and positive about the role of SSGT. The three main important reasons for there being an SSGT in the department were judged to be:

- A staff member to deal with the pastoral needs of students thus ensuring that issues can be dealt with separately from those of an academic nature.
- Ability to deal with the often complex issues student's present.
- Co-ordinated support within the department.

The role did have some impact on practice for staff and the two main areas of impact are:

- They feel they now have more time to spend on academic issues with students and this should have an impact on their creative work.
- Confidence that issues are being dealt within a professional way and that the role is crucial in the Architecture department.

All but one staff member said the role was essential and the reasons for this in the main were:

- Importance of the pastoral role and the demarcation of clearer professional boundaries.
- It allows staff to focus on teaching and enhancing learning.
- Provides a champion for the student voice.

There was a range of ways that students could be supported with pastoral issues before the role of SSGT was established. However, about 50% of staff were unsure as to how students were helped. Other staff either advised the student themselves or referred them to the course leader. There was some evidence of students being referred to Student Services but the concern was that they were not able to follow up on these referrals.

Key findings from staff surveys

- There is a high level of understanding of the role from academic staff within the department.
- Staff are very positive about the department having a role with expertise in, and responsibility for the pastoral element of students' university experience. This has enabled them to focus on the academic side and free them from the concern of their limited professional expertise when dealing with student's issues.
- There was a clear acknowledgement that the department benefits from the involvement of the SSGT in the culture of the courses and day-to-day understanding of the specific issues students experience.

Staff have written:

The SSGT role has had a massive impact on the wellbeing and effectiveness of students AND staff!

The SSGT role has improved the chain of communication between students and the studio tutors. Students have another conduit through which they can communicate- normally to do with issues outside of the curriculum.

It would be feasible to cite numerous individual cases where having an SSGT has had a fundamental impact on the students experience of the course

Students are actively seeking help sooner than before – we are alerted to issues and can take them into consideration when dealing with students. Issues that have caused problems and been out of control in the past and now being dealt with.

There are noticeable changes in the studio – there is a much more positive atmosphere and students seem engaged

Provides students with independent expertise in an area none of the rest of us are trained in – students are using this provision now it is in house

Having a person to discuss personal issues within confidence that doesn't teach the students is a major support tool. Tutors that both teach and provide pastoral care are inherently flawed ...positivity abounds...

Student focus groups

Focus group analysis

Three hour long focus groups were facilitated by an SSGT from another school and the school of Architecture's Senior Administrator and final year students from Brighton Interior and Architecture Student Society (BIASS). The groups consisted of an equal number of Level 4, 5, 6 students and postgraduate students from both Interior Architecture and Architecture. The SSGT was not present for discussions.

Focus group questions

1st years

Why is it important to have a professional other than your tutors to talk to about personal issues/issues affecting your study?

How can the SSGT support students who might be thinking about leaving their course?

What do you think about the role of the SSGT?

How do you think attendance should be addressed? Is monitoring needed?

Why is it important to seek help sooner rather than later?

How does the SSGT role compliment Student Services?

When is counselling appropriate and what can the SSGT help with?

What are the barriers to seeking support?

2nd/3rd years

Why is it important to have a professional other than your tutors to talk to about personal issues/issues affecting your study?

How do you think the introduction of an SSGT has improved Student Well Being?

Prior to having an SSGT in post how well do you think students were supported with issues outside of university that might affect their study?

How can the SSGT support students who might be thinking about leaving their course?

What do you think about the role of the SSGT?

How do you think attendance should be addressed? Is monitoring needed?

Why is it important to seek help sooner rather than later?

How does the SSGT role compliment Student Services?

When is counselling appropriate and what can the SSGT help with when a student doesn't want to go for counselling?

What are the barriers to seeking support?

Across the three groups there were some common themes, although articulated in different ways, were consistent across years and courses.

Key findings from student focus groups

- Students see the SSGT as part of the academic team but neutral and unbiased.
- Knowing the SSGT has a good understanding of the demands of a specific is considered essential – inspired trust and also made it easier to discuss individual issues.
- There are barriers to seeking support from Student Services as students feel the officers there don't know the nature of course demands and culture of the school. They also don't know the tutors in the way the SSGT does, so students find it far easier to explain issues to the SSGT as she knows the context.
- Professionalism was seen as important.
- Important to keep publicising the role and to ensure there is a 'drip feed' of information as to the support the SSGT can give. There were a small number of students who did not have a full understanding and lessons need to be learnt from this.
- Students don't want to discuss personal issues with Tutors – either feel they don't care, that is it not is not appropriate or there is no time available
- Accessibility and flexibility of SSGT availability was a key theme – means students are far more likely to seek help sooner.
- Early intervention was seen as key. Having someone professionally trained to help on a wide range of issues at an early stage can prevent things getting worse and help prevent students dropping out at later stage.
- Feeling that someone is there who cares about the whole picture of students' university experience.

Quotes from students in focus groups:

'The SSGT role is important because you don't feel judged'

'It is good she has an awareness of the course – she has specific knowledge and attends lectures and crits sometimes so she knows what we go through and the specifics of both courses'

'SSGT can give an outsiders view but because she knows the course well can give insight and perspective'

'The fact the role is in the school – proximity/convenient – means it is more encouraging to pop in'

'Her knowledge bridges the gap between academic staff and student support-inside knowledge is essential'

'It's important when it comes to attendance to have someone that addresses issues that are affecting non-attendance – it's good to know that someone is monitoring/cares/follows up'

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- The role of SSGT is considered to be essential within the department by both staff and students. All concerned feel that the fact that there is support available that is separate from what is offered in the academic sphere is beneficial.
- The vast majority of students and staff have an understanding of the role and know how to access the services of the SSGT.
- An overwhelming percentage of students would go to an SSGT if they were considering withdrawing from the course. These students will therefore be supported and if required signposted to other services that will be able to work with them on issues that are impacting on their ability to study e.g. finance, emotional support, study skills.
- Students are less likely to take academic concerns to counsellors than in years prior to the appointment of an SSGT.
- A number of issues mentioned as difficult within NSS have begun to be addressed by the SSGT.
- There is evidence that location of room used by SSGT impacts on the number of students who access the service. The closer the room is to the place in which the student connects most closely with has an impact on their likelihood of accessing the support.
- Students seem reluctant to use the services of university departments (e.g. Student services) and see more benefit in working with staff (or discussing with fellow students) that have an understanding of how the department works.
- There is evidence that a more sustained information campaign through the year that highlights the services of the SSGT would be beneficial.
- A significant number of students spoke to no one about their concerns prior to the SSGT being in place.
- There is evidence that students welcome the fact that their attendance is monitored and any lapses in attendance followed up in a supportive manner.

Recommendations

- There is evidence that the role of SSGT is considered to be beneficial for both staff and students and is instrumental in enhancing student engagement. Students feel supported and feel they have a place and person to take their concerns to who will work to empower them to seek solutions to their

problems and to enable them to continue on their course wherever possible. The role should continue and be increasingly embedded in the ethos of the department.

- Rooms should be allocated somewhere near to the centre of the department if possible. Students' familiarity with the location and its proximity to their work space makes it more likely they will self-refer. A confidential pleasant environment is important as many students will find it hard to make first appointment. This will have implication for the wider university community.
- SSGT needs to invest time in learning about schools unique culture and spend time with academic staff to get an understanding of how they perceive student issues and course demands. Ideally the SSGT should have a good grounding in course subject and or a genuine interest and affinity with the subject area. An SSGT who is visible and plays a role in activities within schools is seen by students as very much part of the school culture and will therefore understand their specific issues.
- Some students are not aware of the service - more publicity is required at the beginning of the academic year. Some students suggested compulsory 1-1 sessions for level 4 students. There are practical difficulties with this but can be discussed and may be appropriate for some courses. Evidence that publicity needs to continue throughout the academic year and there will be implications for this for other schools.
- Continue to ensure that SSGTs have a high profile in the school to ensure all staff and students understand the role and that it is embedded in the work of the department. There needs to be a formal reporting process in the school to ensure the work is seen as of a high value.
- Collaborative working with officers from Student Services should continue and develop. The SSGT is able to use her understanding of the needs of students in Architecture to ensure that targeted information sessions etc. can be provided. This will help students to have more clarity as to the services offered and an understanding of the relevance of this to their personal circumstances. This will be an important development and will allow enhancements to practice in other schools.
- Both staff and students are reassured by seeing SSGT in lectures, activities and assessment activities such as presentations and this should be encouraged in other schools.
- Close working with course leaders is essential for good communication, for the avoidance of duplication and possibly to ensure there is no conflicting advice given. Regular feedback to academic staff on key themes and common issues is essential.
- Working with course reps and student societies all helps students see the SSGT is there for them.
- Working closely with year leaders on attendance issues can help prevent students withdrawing from university.

The recommendations that can be made as a result of this project will enable us to not only enhance the work of the SSGT within the department of Architecture but

also to take some of our findings into other schools to enhance practice. The character and ethos in each school is different but there are common themes around room location, communication, task assignment and profile of the SSGT that have been clarified as a result of our research. It is hoped that these findings can be used for further developments of the role across the university.



AMOSSHE

The Student Services Organisation