

Student Loneliness & Social Isolation: Research-Informed Projects

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Context to Project

- Loneliness affects students' academic and social adjustment
- Suggested loneliness is correlated with the increasing prevalence of mental illness and decreased levels of wellbeing amongst students in the UK
- Feelings of loneliness increased drastically as a result of COVID-19
- Institutions, such as universities, can strengthen the sense of community and bring back positive connection

Under the Enhancement Theme 'Resilient Learning Communities', the work at Queen Margaret University aimed to...

Better understand the experiences of loneliness and social isolation amongst QMU students during COVID-19

Two phased research-led approach, with findings informing a range of projects and initiatives at the university

Phase 1 (July 2020-January 2023)

Experiences of Loneliness & Social Isolation

Psycho-social and convergent mixed-methods approach; *(data generated between February-October 2021)*

- 1 student questionnaire (296 responses)
- 1 staff questionnaire (92 responses)
- 2 semi-structured focus groups (12 participants)

Phase 2 (January-April 2023)

Coping and Resilience

Psycho-social qualitative methodology; students-as-partners approach

- 1 semi-structured focus group (5 participants)
- Re-analysis of Phase 1 data
- 2x training sessions on ethics and conducting focus groups with student partners

Key Findings: Phase 1

- Pre-exposure to loneliness & social isolation prior to COVID-19 significantly predicts greater likelihood of such experiences during it

Core theme of **community**

- Missing informal interactions and opportunities for co-constructed learning
- The diversity of student journeys
- Reliance on academic staff for support
- The many ways students coped with loneliness and social isolation

These findings have informed the design and implementation of several projects aimed at supporting students at QMU



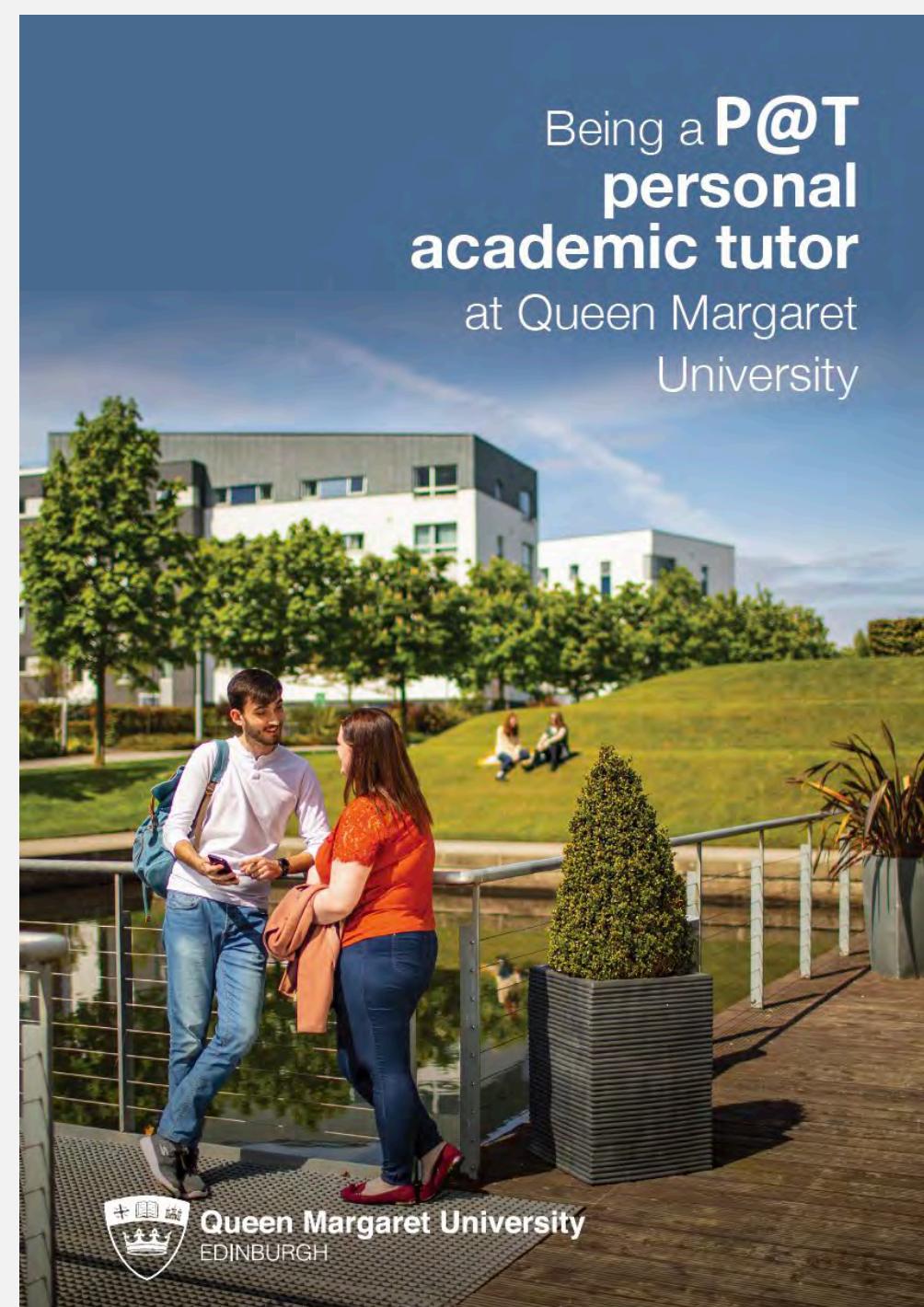
Expanded PAT Training

- Students reaching out to lecturers or PATs when needing support, more than to other support services available
- Some staff feeling unsure how to to handle such issues

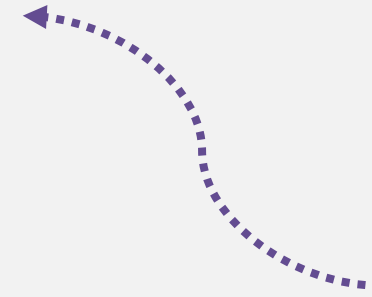
-> PAT training working group

- 75 trained so far; more confident in, better prepared, working closer with student services

Being a **P@T**
personal
academic tutor
at Queen Margaret
University



Thank Goodness It's Thursday!




- Lacking sense of community
- The difficulty of building relationships online
- Lack of informal interaction in academic, public and liminal spaces

“We've also had lovely comments about how TGIT helps them feel connected to their fellow students, staff, and our wider campus community. This is important, given a recent survey of our students showed the sense of loneliness and isolation they were experiencing as a result of the pandemic disruption”

(Dr Kat Lord-Watson)

Peer Assisted Learning Scheme

- A feeling of academic isolation; of learning by themselves
- Missing opportunities for co-constructed learning



The poster features the PALS logo at the top left, which includes a stylized brain icon. The title 'PSE Sessions' is centered at the top. To the right of the title is a pink brain illustration. Below the title, there are three white boxes, each representing a session. Each box contains a date in the 'March' month, a time slot, and a location. The sessions are: March 06 (13:00-14:00 on campus) for 'L1: Introduction to Psychology', March 07 (12:00-13:00 on campus) for 'L2: Self and Identity', and March 08 (13:00-14:00 On Campus) for 'L1: Sociological Imagination pt2'.

Date	Time	Location	Topic
March 06	13:00-14:00 (on campus)		L1: Introduction to Psychology
March 07	12:00-13:00 (on campus)		L2: Self and Identity
March 08	13:00-14:00 (On Campus)		L1: Sociological Imagination pt2



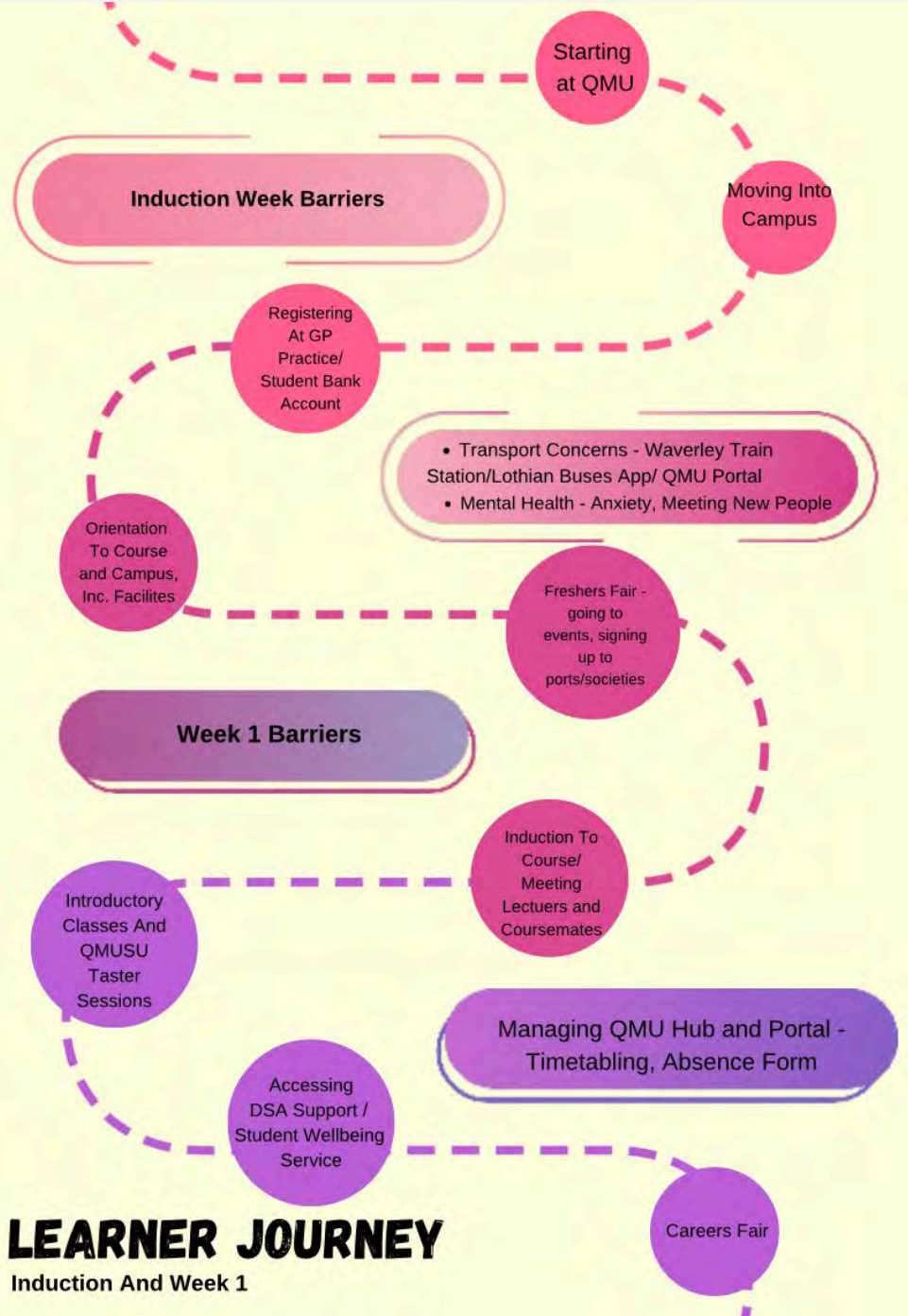
-> Increased social role of PALS

- Socials, peer study spaces
- Community amongst leaders and students more generally



Learner Journey Maps

- Experience of loneliness and social isolation varies person to person; also some common challenges within specific groups of students
 - International students
 - Direct Entrant students
 - First year students
- Students-as-partners approach initially with four 'Student Champions' (Mya Bell, Ellie Birchall, Christie McDove and Zee Wasfy)



Student Videos

- A collaborative, student-led means of sharing information and disseminating messaging around loneliness and isolation
 - Additional funding obtained to enable film students to interview peers at community-based event (TGIT) and to support students to create a film documenting
- Capturing student voices & experiences and disseminating key messages of the research



Key Findings: Phase 2

Specific focus on coping and resilience

- 'Doing' and 'being'
- Distinction between 'good' & 'bad' coping
- Problematising resilience
- Community

Collaboration with **Student Champions**

- Enhanced the quality and relevance of this study, as well as provided valuable training opportunities

Importance of a relational person-centred approach in providing support for students in relation to loneliness and social isolation: more investment and training of PATs, more and better resourced (human) student support services

- Focused, effective and strategic ET approach over the past three years
- Benefits of research-informed initiatives and direct use of live and relevant data – qualitative and quantitative – to rapidly **develop interventions** and **inform development** to better understand and improve the student experience
- Involvement of students as partners in the research and dissemination process; direct student input and for professional development