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## PTAS Project Report (for SMALL PROJECT GRANTS)

### Project Title:

An exploratory project: Enhancing students' experience through co-constructing academic community

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**Principal Investigator :** Farah Akbar

**School / Department :** Institute for Education, Teaching and Leadership

**Team members :** Xiaomei Sun and Annie Yang.

### For further information, please contact:

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Grant recipients are expected to submit a brief report at the conclusion of their project which outlines briefly the following : nature of work completed; outcomes; benefits to student learning/student experience; dissemination activity (where relevant – actual and planned) and how the activity could inform future work or be transferred to other subject areas in the University. The brief report will be published on the IAD web pages.

### Brief Report (maximum 500 words)

#### What did you do?

We recruited seven post-graduate research (PGR) students who offered online drop-in sessions. Post-graduate taught (PGT) students booked these sessions based on their personal needs. To ensure incremental improvement of the project, each participating PGT student was asked to complete a feedback form after the session. To gain detailed feedback and constructive suggestions, 27 participating PGT students were sent invitation emails at the end of Phase 1 of the project, and eight of them consented to be interviewed to provide us with detailed and constructive feedback.

#### What did you find out?

Data collected from 53 feedback forms and interviews with eight PGT participants were thematically analysed. Findings indicate that PGT students benefited from the co-constructed academic community in aspects such as gaining timely help with academic and non-academic issues, and more importantly, a sense of belonging and connection.

#### How did you disseminate your findings?

We presented our findings and gained some positive and useful feedback from the audience at the Learning and Teaching Conference held by the University of Edinburgh in June 2022 [namely 15 June 2022, parallel session 5, “An exploratory project: Enhancing students’ experience through co-constructing academic community” (Xiaomei Sun, Sepideh Daghbandan, Annie Yang & Farah Akbar) [Short talk]

#### What have been the benefits to student learning?

This project explored the feasibility of co-constructing an academic community to provide instant, specific, and ongoing assistance to PGT students, while honing the communication, social, and career skills of PGR students. The collaborative nature of this initiative and the subsequent

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relationship formed between PGT and PGR students may contribute to building a healthy and thriving academic community and improve student experience for both sides of the participants.

**How could these benefits be extended to other parts of the university?**

Student experience has been a major topic for research and discussion in the university. Some related projects include Peer Support project (led by Andrew Horrell) and Dissertation Buddies (led by Julie Smith). Further communication with such project organisers may produce deeper understanding of related issues.

**Who can be contacted for further details?**

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**Financial statement**

This project has utilised the funding awarded to it by the PTAS adjudication committee and the Principal Investigator or School Administrator appropriate can provide financial statements showing the funding usage as and when required by the UoE Development Trusts who may require it for auditing purposes.

**Please send an electronic PDF copy of this report to:**

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