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Twenty-Five Years of Peer-Assisted Learning: A Review of Philosophy Proctoring at the University of Leeds

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Abstract

What happens when a peer-assisted learning scheme becomes "business as usual" rather than innovation? The proctoring scheme in undergraduate philosophy programmes at the University of Leeds has been running for over 25 years, making it one of the oldest (and possibly the single oldest) continuously running higher education peer-assisted learning schemes in the country. Over time, the centrality of the scheme in the teaching environment has changed, particularly in the shared understanding of philosophy learning and teaching and in the practical constraints of curriculum and timetable space. Using the insights of teachers, students, and graduates, this report identifies the extent of success for proctoring in fostering philosophical learning and developing academic community, the two major objectives for the scheme. We also identify the conditions for success of peer-assisted learnings schemes, which our results suggest. An unexpected outcome of this project is found in identifying a challenge around "value" resulting from the fee-paying environment in higher education where peer-assisted learning may be (mis)understood as "teaching on the cheap." These findings raise important questions for all higher education peer-assisted learning schemes about how schemes are embedded, sustained, and remain central to the learning environment in a rapidly changing education environment.

Introduction

Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) at the University of Leeds has been part of the undergraduate philosophy programme for over 25 years. PAL schemes developed in UK higher education (HE) in the early 1990s (Keenan, 2014; Donaldson & Topping, 1996), so we can assume proctoring is one of the earliest examples in the country. Proctorials (peer-facilitated philosophical discussions) are embedded in the curriculum and are part of a distinctive model of intellectual inquiry. In 2017, the proctoring scheme experienced a sudden and dramatic dip in the number of students committing to act as peer leaders (proctors), followed by a similarly dramatic recovery in the following year. This experience raised a series of questions about how, if at all, we could measure the success and effectiveness of proctoring. This happened alongside a growing awareness of how course changes were affecting the engagement of students with the scheme. Given this long history, and the experience of new challenges, it was clear that not only would the scheme benefit from a holistic review of impact, but also that the outcomes of such a review would be of more general interest to those using or analysing PAL schemes in HE.

The literature on PAL is extensive and refers to a range of activities that involve peer-to-peer learning support. Topping (2001, 2005) focusses on the school setting but identifies a range of models (e.g., peer tutoring and cooperative

learning) that can also be found in HE settings. It is in subjects such as medicine (e.g., Meertens, 2016; Field et al., 2007) and languages (e.g., Cui et al., 2015) where PAL is most prevalent in HE, and it is therefore in these disciplinary contexts where most research and analysis of these schemes can be found. Analyses of HE PAL schemes focus on areas such as the impact of PAL on student performance and experience (e.g., Hodgson et al., 2015; Sudhakar et al., 2016), the impact of PAL on culture and attitudes to learning (e.g., Hilsdon, 2014), the relative merits of PAL versus other forms of activity (e.g., Sevenhuysen, 2014) and the conditions for success of particular schemes (e.g., Hammond et al., 2010), including the use of PAL in online and e-learning (e.g., Watts, Malliris & Billingham, 2015; Edwards & Bone, 2012). Studies also look at the benefits of PAL for the student leader (e.g., Galbraith & Winterbottom, 2011) and their training needs (e.g., West et al., 2017; Carr et al., 2016).

Proctoring is unlike the other cases available in this literature in terms of its disciplinary location, longevity, and the particular organisational form. This account therefore provides a distinctive perspective on PAL schemes and introduces some new questions to the existing literature. We gathered data from a cross-section of groups in order to evaluate success and effectiveness, and to identify the pressures that are experienced by those taking part in the scheme as educators or students. Our three principal findings are

1. that the success of proctoring in supporting philosophy learning and academic community is not clear-cut;
2. the conditions for success of proctorials are primarily concerned with training, programme context, and commitment to the scheme; and
3. the fee-paying environment changes student perceptions of PAL.

Context: Proctoring at Leeds and the Motivation for this Study

The University of Leeds has one of the largest undergraduate philosophy programmes in the UK with a 2018 intake of just over 250 students on a range of programmes including single honours philosophy and a range of interdisciplinary and joint honours courses. The student body is majority female with high levels of socioeconomic advantage and relatively low numbers of students who are disabled or from Black, Asian, or other ethnic minority backgrounds. This profile is not unusual for a Russell Group university philosophy programme. There are 23 permanent full-time members of staff who teach philosophy, and the programme is highly regarded both for its teaching (14 out of 55 in the Complete University Guide 2018 rankings) and for its research (79% of outputs judged as world leading or internationally excellent in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework). Almost all students and most staff will engage with the proctoring system at some point during their studies or teaching.

“Proctorials” (short for “proctored tutorials”) are student-led discussion classes for up to 12 first-year undergraduate students, and they are embedded in a subset of philosophy modules alongside lectures and tutorials. The proctorial is chaired by a “proctor” (upper-level undergraduate student) and centres around discussion questions and a set reading, which the first-year students (the “proctees”) are required to read before class. Using the nomenclature outlined by Olaussen et al. (2016), the scheme is broadly “near-peer didactic” because of the ratio of proctees to proctor and the different academic levels of proctor and proctees. However, the sessions are not didactic

but instead facilitated. The proctor facilitates the class by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to contribute, that no one dominates proceedings, that discussion stays on topic, and that the group proceeds at an appropriate pace. The proctor may encourage the proctees to deepen their level of engagement, for example by inviting them to justify their assertions or to anticipate and consider what people who disagree with them might say.

The proctoring scheme is designed to support philosophical skill development through active and critical engagement with scholarly material and to develop a sense of belonging to the academic community. This is unlike the majority of schemes discussed in the literature where there is a focus on more specific (often practical) skills and knowledge and on improving student academic performance (ten Cate et al., 2012). Critical engagement with scholarly material is especially important in philosophy, a discipline which values the questioning of received wisdom. Philosophical questions are typically controversial, whose answers are a matter of debate, and it is central to their pursuit that students actively discuss and pass critical judgement on the views of others (including authority figures). Proctorials give students an initial opportunity to identify, articulate, defend, and change their views on controversial issues. The absence of a formal intellectual authority figure is therefore key. The model adopted is broadly one that is a conscious effort to engage students in a community of practice where

> The novice is not conceived as a (passive) recipient of codified knowledge made available through formal instruction; rather that "curriculum" is available to newcomers through their increasing participation (with others) in the relevant and inevitably structured social practices (activities, tasks, habits) of the community (Fuller 2007, p. 19).

The context and nature of the proctoring scheme prompted four key questions that this project sought to explore:

1. To what extent does proctoring enhance learning in philosophy?
2. To what extent does proctoring enhance academic community in philosophy?
3. What are the conditions for success of the proctorial?
4. What are the factors impacting the experience of proctoring?

Method

An online survey, with a follow-up hard-copy survey, was adopted as the primary research method. There was a total of 89 responses: 60 current students, 17 former students, and 12 (current or former) teaching staff. Quantitative data is supported by qualitative material resulting from open-ended questions.

There were fewer survey responses from staff than expected. As there are currently 23 permanent members of teaching staff in philosophy, the 12 responses are a high proportion in comparison to the proportion of students who responded, but still a surprisingly low proportion given the assumed significance of proctoring to philosophy programmes. Although all teaching staff should be aware of the proctoring system, it is nonetheless the case that most staff members are not directly involved with the running of modules

involving proctorials or with the training of the proctors, and so they may have less strong views or less awareness of the significance of their insights.

It was notable that all student respondents tended to be high achievers. More than half the current students reported their highest module mark as 70 or above (a first), and of the 17 former students, five received a first-class degree, 10 an upper second, and only two a lower second-class degree. This presents perhaps the most significant bias in the findings.

The qualitative comments were analysed using the questions themselves as the primary coding schema but latterly adopting additional coding nodes based on recurrence in the qualitative data. Hence the finding about the fee-paying context is not suggested by our research questions but was drawn from qualitative responses that indicated this theme as significant.

The most notable limitations of the study are that for operational reasons, it was not possible to triangulate against longitudinal measures of outcomes for individual students nor to compare impact against a control group. However, triangulation of the findings with existing research on PAL provides a basis for claiming some validity, although somewhat hampered by the relative lack of literature on long-standing PAL schemes within the humanities. Some of the respondent groups were small, and the quantitative data in all cases can only be seen as indicative. A key additional limitation, which we suggest is an area of potential further study, is that we were unable to explore the impact of key demographic features on student experience of proctoring. Features such as pre-HE educational background, entry tariff, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic background may have an impact on the proctoring experience. However, within the constraints of the current project, it was not ethically justified to collect sensitive data from participants. Although there are limitations in the data, there is nonetheless a range of material for a nuanced reflection on the success and effectiveness of the proctoring scheme.

Finding 1: The Success of Proctoring in Supporting Philosophy Learning and Academic Community is Not Clear-Cut

In this section, we discuss findings related to our first two research questions regarding the extent to which proctoring enhances learning and academic community in philosophy for either proctor or proctee. The data suggests that benefits to philosophy learning are stronger among proctors than among proctees, and the benefits to academic community may be limited.

It is expected that, because of the type of skill being developed, the success of proctoring in improving learning may not be apparent to students until later in their programme of study when they can recognise how these skills have become fundamental to their learning and practice as a philosopher. However, the data shows that 58% of past proctees (50 responses) consider that “Being a proctee improved my learning in philosophy,” which is slightly lower than the 60.9% of current proctees (23 responses) who felt strongly or very strongly that “Proctorials are improving my learning in philosophy.” Staff (12 respondents) were more positive about the benefit of proctorials with 75% strongly agreeing or agreeing that “Proctorials improve the learning of proctees.” Comments suggest that the expected outcome (students recognise the benefit later in their academic journey) is to some extent experienced, with several past proctees including comments such as, “Looking back, I can see that they were more

useful than I thought at the time." This data raises some interesting questions about the effectiveness and success of proctoring in philosophy learning.

Firstly, it is plausible that students and graduates are likely to have found it difficult to disentangle their philosophy learning as it has been shaped by proctoring and as it has been shaped by other learning experiences. Additionally, the longer-term intended consequences of proctoring mean that students may not be best placed to recognise their development. Secondly, one past proctee comment in the survey raised an interesting view about the benefit of proctorials:

> I can see the idea behind it, but I don't think I was mature enough as a first-year student to use it properly (and I was one of the few in my group who did try to some extent).

This statement suggests that there may be a stage of academic transition that is required prior to the induction into proctoring. There may be a set of academic skills that might be experienced as "maturity" (commitment, organisation, reflectivity) that could be usefully developed prior to experience of PAL. One comment is insufficient to make this claim, but there is potential for further research to understand the skills that might be developed in a longer-term induction to PAL.

Proctors reported the strongest expression of satisfaction with their learning through proctoring. Of the eight responses, 75% strongly agreed or agreed that "Being a proctor improved/is improving my learning in philosophy." The qualitative responses indicate some of the reasons for this level of proctor satisfaction. One current proctor noted that

> In my first year, I felt that proctorials weren't particularly useful for my progress so attended very few of them. However now I can understand the way in which it gets students comfortable talking about difficult topics…without worrying about saying the wrong thing, which I'm sure is really useful for their progress.

This is supported by staff responses in which 92% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that "Proctorials improve the philosophical learning of proctors." One noted that

> A good proctorial…clearly reinforces their [proctors'] sense of what philosophical argument is about.

The significance of the leader experience in PAL has been noted in the literature for some time (Topping, 2005; Smith, 2013). Reddy and Williams (2016) specifically find that "student teachers" benefit most from PAL schemes compared with student learners.

There are several reasons why proctors may experience a stronger understanding of, and satisfaction with, proctoring. Firstly, being upper-level students, the transition to independent critical philosophical thinking is more likely to have been achieved. These students are able to look back on the experience and recognise that the proctoring experience shaped their academic development. However, we have noted that not all past proctees experience

this. Secondly then, proctors have had a longer opportunity to reflect on the purposes of proctoring *and* have been doubly inducted (as proctee and then proctor). This leaves them better able to articulate the objectives and recognise that these have been achieved in their own learning.

This finding prompted us to reflect on whether philosophical learning was what motivates students to volunteer to be proctors. A small-scale follow-up survey with 12 proctors identified that a key aspect of their motivation for taking part in proctoring was future employability, with nine out of 12 specifically identifying the benefit for future career plans (especially teaching) or the development of skills useful for their CV (including facilitation, leadership, and communication skills). This insight provides a useful dimension in considering the value and significance of proctoring. Although the objectives of the scheme focus on academic learning and academic community, a key motivator for proctor volunteering is the employability benefit of the scheme.

The second area on which the primary survey focussed was "academic community." The objective to develop academic community through ensuring that students have consistent weekly engagement with the same set of proctees, and the same proctor, was key in the founding of proctoring, but since has become lost to the scheme as a result of programme developments including fewer contacts with a more varied group of proctees. The data provides evidence that the scheme as currently formed is less likely to support the initial objective to foster a sense of belonging to an academic community.

Proctors and teaching staff felt most strongly that academic community was supported by proctoring. All proctors (past and present) either strongly agreed or agreed that being a proctor improved, or is improving, their sense of belonging to an academic community in philosophy. Of staff respondents, 92% strongly agreed or agreed that "Proctorials improve a sense of belonging to an academic community in philosophy." For proctees, however, there was less unanimity and notably some of the least strong approval scores. Of the 50 past proctees responding to the question, "Being a proctee improved my sense of belonging to an academic community in philosophy," 42% strongly agreed or agreed and 30% neither agreed nor disagreed. Of the 23 current proctees, 69.6% strongly agreed or agreed. This suggests some sense of improvement whilst being a proctee but that this is lost over time. Positive qualitative comments about sense of belonging noted being able to "meet people on your course in a more relaxed environment," and that the scheme "provided us with a close group of friends on our course, which is often hard to find." One student noted how important this was for particular groups: "As a mature part-time student, there is a risk of being detached from the main student body—proctoring helped."

It is useful to compare this finding to results from the National Student Survey. Although there are significant critiques of the NSS, (e.g., Thiel, 2019; Agrawal et al., 2014; Higginson, 2016), the results influence student education activity in English HE institutions. Question 21 of the NSS measures response to the statement, "I feel part of a community of staff and students," and question 22 measures response to "I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course." In 2018, when 96% of graduating students on the single honours philosophy course responded positively to question 27

("Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course"), only 62% responded positively to question 21, and only 40% responded positively to question 22. Although this is not only a response to the experience of proctoring, NSS results demonstrate that the objective for proctoring to support the development of academic community has not been achieved. Interestingly, it may have been proctors (final-year students who compete the NSS) who were among those most likely to respond positively to NSS Q21 and 22 as they expressed the strongest sense that proctoring had supported them to feel part of an academic community.

Looking to the original objectives of the scheme and the literature, which suggest the benefits of belonging to a "community of practice," it is important to understand why students do not feel proctoring supports their sense of belonging. Our next section, which looks at the conditions for success of proctoring, offers some reflections on what can be done to ensure the scheme meets its objectives.

Finding 2: The Conditions for Success of Proctorials are Primarily Concerned with Training, Programme Context, and Commitment to the Scheme

Proctoring has experienced significant changes in its position within the philosophy curriculum at Leeds. Changes in the programme have decreased over time the visibility, significance, and centrality of the proctorials to the learning experience. This has an impact on the teaching context for proctoring. The teaching context includes not only the teaching objects (readings and discussion questions) but also the engagement between proctorial, tutorial, and lecture; the induction of students and staff into proctoring; and the endorsement for proctorials that teaching staff give. The survey data highlighted that respondents consider the teaching context for proctorials to be a key factor in ensuring their success. This was visible in attitudes to the discussion questions set, respondents' views on the relationship between the proctorials and other teaching activities, and their expectations around induction. Teaching staff and students alike recognise that the conditions for success of proctoring are shaped by the programme, teaching context, and the induction of staff and students into the scheme. The changing visibility and priority of proctoring has had an impact not only because of visible changes to timetabled space and programme embeddedness but also because this influences the way the scheme is engaged with and promoted by teaching staff.

One of the key features of proctorials is the way in which the sessions themselves are structured around a series of discussion questions. Unsurprisingly, respondents considered it to be "very" or "quite" important for a successful proctorial that the questions are conducive to discussion (proctors: 100%, past proctees: 96%, current proctees: 96%, staff: 100%). As one former proctor noted:

> When the questions are not easily adapted for a fruitful discussion, proctorials can be very difficult to run.

This is to be expected—the discussion questions and the reading set for the proctorial are the primary learning materials, and they must be appropriate. Questions that require information recall, or are too simple or too challenging, will not lead to a productive discussion. The fact that the proctor is there to

facilitate discussion, rather than participate or "teach" makes the significance of the question-setting even more important. A past proctee noted this tension:

> I feel either readings should be made shorter and more accessible with care taken over the questions to facilitate discussion, or that proctors should be allowed to play a more active role in discussion.

Similarly, the majority of respondents considered it to be "very" or "quite" important for a successful proctorial that there is engagement between the proctorial, tutorial, and lecture material (proctors: 100%, past proctees: 88%, current proctees: 91.3%, staff: 75%). Clear continuation and relationship with tutorial questions (and follow-on from lecture material) is important for an effective proctorial. One past proctee noted:

> If the questions for proctorials are the same/very similar to the questions for tutorials, it can make the students feel bored and frustrated with what seems like a slow pace.

This is significant in that proctorials have become increasingly separated from the programme and module context in which they occur.

The lowest positive response (with 75% answering "very" or "quite" important) concerning the relationship between proctorials, tutorials, and lectures came from staff respondents. Responses from students suggest they have a clear sense of the importance of continuity of the different teaching activities, but a lower proportion of staff share this view. Although the numbers are too low to draw strong conclusions, it is arguably the case that teaching staff do not have a uniformly strong sense of the pedagogic role of proctoring. The primary purpose of the proctorial is to develop general philosophic skills, but module leaders may focus specifically on the extent to which proctorials develop module content learning. That staff feel unsure about this relationship is visible in one of the staff responses:

> Perhaps some more thinking needs to be done on the connection between proctorial questions and tutorial questions. They should be distinct, but perhaps more integrated than they usually are.

Setting proctorial questions, relating proctorials to tutorials and lectures, and inducting students into the proctorial system happen at module level and place the module leader at the heart of the proctorial scheme. The responses received suggest that staff induction into the proctorial scheme may be as important as student induction. One staff member commented that "Many staff are often left at a distance from the whole activity even though it involves all our first-year students." Although staff teaching in modules with proctorials will be aware of the proctorials, and will set questions and reading for them, they are doing so in a context where the whole programme is decreasingly orientated towards PAL and are therefore, plausibly, not receiving the induction into a "community of practice" around proctoring, which would ensure the level of engagement that the proctoring scheme needs in order to be effective.

Although the module leader is central to the effective running of proctoring, it is also the case that the proctor must be well equipped and confident in order

for proctorials to be successful. The majority of respondents indicated that the training of the proctor, and the proctor's ability to chair the class, were either "very" or "quite" important for a successful proctorial. Of current or former proctors, 87.5% considered the training of the proctor to be very or quite important for a successful proctorial, and 100% of staff agreed. The proctor's ability to "chair" the proctorial was also, unsurprisingly, of significance to respondents, with 100% of current and former proctors, 92% of past proctees, 95.7% of current proctees, and 100% of staff considering it to be "very" or "quite" important. One past proctee notes the reason for the significance of training:

> The proctors did not seem to know how to engage the group in discussion. This often led to very short proctorials.

If a proctor does not have the necessary skills to facilitate discussion, it is not always the case that training will correct this, but it is important, as with any PAL scheme, that appropriate training and supervision is provided to ensure that they are able to lead the group.

It is also worth noting that the authority of the proctor is a specific challenge in the model adopted in proctoring. The upper-level student is not intended to be an intellectual authority figure, but it is clear from responses that they are seen as an authority figure in terms of the skills content of proctorials. The comment above, indicating that the proctor was expected to be able to maintain discussion, suggests that the group does not take responsibility for the process but instead relies on the proctor. In many cases, proctors do facilitate and allow students to collaborate in their own learning. One current proctor noted

> My last proctorial made me realise that I have managed to create a comfortable and collaborative environment for students to discuss issues.

However, one staff member gave a negative portrayal of how a proctorial may fail, which indicates an expectation of proctorials that is not the same as is intended both in focussing on the knowledge the proctor brings to the discussion and also the reliance on "authority" to prompt engagement:

> It's easy to see what the pitfalls are: clueless or unreliable discussion, with no one there to correct misunderstandings. Absence of a tutor might also encourage poor attendance, little or no preparation. I imagine that some proctorials must be pretty dispiriting.

The clarity about the role of proctors, alongside issues about materials, indicates the extent to which staff and student induction and training in the process is key. However, in a long-running scheme with a taken-for-granted local narrative, it is interesting to see how the scheme has evolved. The original intention has always been for the proctorials to be a facilitated discussion space without an intellectual authority figure in which students can experience collaborative learning and develop their confidence in philosophical discussion. However, it is evident that the expectation has evolved towards something that looks much more like a standard tutorial.

The conditions for success in philosophy proctoring suggested by these findings are

1. training and induction for all staff and students involved in the relevant programmes of study;
2. embeddedness of the scheme in the programmes of study;
3. continuity in subject matter between lecture, tutorial, and proctorial; and
4. proctorial questions and readings selected to be maximally conducive to discussion rather than to knowledge acquisition.

These conditions can also be translated into relevant questions for all PAL contexts despite the specificity of the proctoring scheme. Firstly, the training and ongoing support of peer leaders is important (West et al., 2017; Carr et al., 2016), but what that training might look like has not always been so clear, and there is limited discussion in the literature of the way in which teaching staff are trained and inducted. Secondly, although Hilsdon (2013) notes similar impacts around embeddedness in his study of a scheme running only since 2011, this study is unusual in looking at a scheme that has run for some considerable amount of time and being able to reflect on how incremental, and sometimes dramatic, programme and culture change can affect the success of PAL schemes. This long-term view is largely missing from the literature of PAL, and we suggest that this is a significant potential area for additional research. Lastly, it is useful to note the extent to which the preceding factors influence the effectiveness of the learning activities proposed—discussion questions and readings in this case. Again, there is potentially a humanities perspective on this that would differ from the STEM context within which PAL schemes are more frequently analysed.

Finding 2 of this study has outlined the conditions for success of proctorials and noted that these are significantly impacted by induction, training, and the teaching context. The significance of these findings for other PAL schemes has been indicated. Finding 3 is our most unexpected finding and concerns the extent to which the fee-paying environment changes student perceptions of PAL.

Finding 3: The Fee-Paying Environment Changes Student Perceptions of Peer-Assisted Learning

Among the qualitative responses to the survey, there was a small but unexpected set of comments that raised an issue about how PAL is perceived in a fee-paying context. This caused us to reflect differently on our results regarding engagement with proctoring. In a fee-paying environment, it is easier for PAL to be seen as "teaching on the cheap," and it is harder to convince students that educational volunteering (as proctors) is of benefit to them.

Proctoring was introduced prior to students directly paying course fees in England and Wales. Currently, home student undergraduate fees are £9,250 pa., usually paid through a loan scheme. There is an ongoing debate about the impact of student fees on student expectations (e.g., Bates et al., 2014), particularly in humanities subjects where there is a perception that students receive too few contact hours for the same fee as science students in high contact hour programmes. Although the criticisms of PAL in term of the non-expert leading the non-expert are well documented (Topping, 2005), our

finding about the fee-paying environment seems to offer a different dimension to the usual criticism of PAL as the "pooling of ignorance."

Some of the survey responses (both directly and indirectly) highlighted that some students feel that proctoring is being offered instead of contact hours with a member of staff. One student commented,

> I think [proctoring] is just a way of upping contact hours for philosophy students to come across more contact hours…stop skimping out on arts subjects and giving all the contact hours to BSc students. Why am I paying the same amount for considerably less hours. Ridiculous.

Other comments indicate this preference for more staff contact time, though without the link to fees. For instance, a student responded that "I think I would benefit more from another tutorial rather than a proctorial." Although some PAL schemes are developed with a specific intention to increase contact hours, or are seen as part of the picture of increasing contact hours at minimum cost (Falchikov, 2001), this is not a feature or intention of proctoring.

Having noted this trend, we reviewed responses related to perceptions that being student-led made the proctoring scheme less valuable. Although we had initially seen these comments as related to issues of proctor skills and training, we noted that this might not always be the case. Comments such as "Because it was led by a student, didn't really feel the benefit" and "Students simply will not prepare properly for something that isn't chaired by an academic member of staff. Therefore, proctorials will be unattended and unproductive" were relatively frequent. Rather than seeing proctorials as supporting the core provision, students see them as replacing the core provision and therefore as less valuable. Staff members also recognise the way in which students see proctorials as potentially "instead of" tutorials. One noted that

> If proctees see [proctorials] as to be compared with tutorials, and view the proctor as a poor substitute for a tutor, the proctees can develop a negative attitude to them, and fail to appreciate that [proctorials] are important in developing the habit of informal discussion.

Linked to this perception of value is the issue of attendance. Paradoxically, although students focus on contact hours as a measure of value, there is an ongoing issue with attendance at and/or preparation for classes, and this is felt most keenly in proctorials where low attendance can have disastrous effects—the fewer voices present in the room, the harder it is to sustain a discussion. The survey responses indicated that all survey groups considered proctee attendance to be a "very" or "quite" important success factor for proctorials (87.5% of proctors, 88% of past proctees, 91.3% of current proctees, and 100% of staff). Comments indicated the frustration of respondents with others, for instance, "Poor attendance by other proctees meant that discussion was limited." Attendance is not solely a challenge for proctorials, but within the context of this study, it is instructive that students are showing a devaluing of proctorials by not attending, and this may be related to PAL being seen as replacement for contact hours. We consider it plausible that underlying this issue is a perception that PAL sessions do not represent value for money in a context where students quantify the "cost" of each contact period.

It is also notable that there was a small amount of evidence of reluctance around educational volunteering, which may be linked to the fee-paying environment. The most explicit reference was one respondent who simply stated, "Proctors should be paid." Some respondents could not see how they might benefit from being a proctor, with one past proctee noting that "As a final-year student, I'm not sure I would feel the benefit of being a proctor. It seems like a lot of time supervising proctorials, which you can't really engage or benefit from."

Although the evidence to support this finding is limited, and broadly relies on inference, it seems clear that there are some important questions to ask about how fee-paying impacts student experience of, and attitudes to PAL—particularly in disciplinary contexts such as the humanities, where contact hours are a contentious topic. Relating this to other educational volunteering would be interesting and may reveal some of the more hidden impacts of fee-paying on student experience.

Conclusions

Proctoring is at a crossroads. The taken-for-granted nature of the scheme over many years has hit new challenges that have led the scheme to be less effective against its objectives. The reduction in programme embeddedness and frequency of proctorials (Finding 2) have undermined the ability of the scheme to meet its objectives (Finding 1), while changing student attitudes to learning and especially contact hours suggest some resistance to proctoring (Finding 3). Ongoing challenges such as staff and student induction and training take on a heightened significance in this context, and they challenge us to think more carefully about the how and why of our practice, our measures of success, and our sharing of best practice with those who might benefit from the insights of such a long-running programme. However, the lack of other long-term whole-cohort HE PAL schemes with which to compare proctoring, the lack of a control group, or of baseline data prior to implementation, leave us with only student and staff satisfaction and (informed) subjective judgements as our primary data source. Although these are of benefit, they limit conclusions.

PAL in HE runs the risk of being forever "new," with very few long-standing projects being reviewed and discussed. The literature focusses on new initiatives, measured against baseline standards or with control groups. Excellent literature exists to understand how to initiate an HE PAL scheme, but much less exists to discuss how to sustain a scheme. This limitation raises an important and challenging set of questions for those involved in PAL about how readily these schemes can be sustained and how successful they can be considered without long-term outcomes and evaluation. For those starting new schemes, our strongest advice is to put in place a clear set of performance indicators against your objectives. Retrofitting these is, in our experience, difficult and unsatisfactory.

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