



## **Student empowerment and development through note-taking in one-to-one sessions**

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### ***Presentation abstract***

This study was prompted by a senior management request at the authors' university to change record keeping practices. What followed was an exploration of the theoretical foundations that underpin the authors' underlying philosophy on case notes as a means for advancing student empowerment.<sup>1</sup>

Findings revealed that through the application of reflective practice, case notes could enhance student empowerment and development. Without reflection, however, case notes were more likely to follow the medical model in which they were 'norm referenced and deficit driven' (Cheek and Rudge, 1994, p.42). Co-authored, cloud-based case notes had the power to embody the 'person-centred, emancipatory values' (Webster, 2023, p.2) espoused by ALDinHE and ICALLD partner organisations such as AALL. These case notes were found to have changed the dynamic between student and learning developer; students had greater agency both during and after the session to interpret, adapt, and reflect upon their experiences. The new practices enhanced inclusivity by emphasising a strengths-based approach and by reducing students' cognitive and emotional barriers.

The ALDcon25 workshop explored how expanded notions of accessibility, equity, and inclusivity could change practices in one-to-one (1-2-1) sessions.<sup>2</sup> Drawing upon the theories of self-regulated learning (Chickering and Reisser, 1993; Zimmerman, 2015) and

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<sup>1</sup> Case notes are defined by the authors as any records related to one-to-one (1-2-1) sessions between a learning developer and student (Iordanou et al., 2023). Case notes may include a meeting summary, the student's goals or challenges, and any action items and/or resources provided.

<sup>2</sup> One-to-one sessions have many different names, including consultation, coaching session, study skills appointment, and writing appointment.

critical pedagogy (Freire, 2018) that inform the authors' practices, the session shared key elements of literature review, survey results, and findings on case note practices. An interesting highlight was the intersections and disjunctions between theory and practice. Participants were encouraged to discuss best practices to enhance student empowerment during the session with a view to leave with tangible ideas to implement in their respective work.

**Keywords:** student empowerment; case notes; note-taking; one-to-one sessions; inclusivity.

### ***Community response***

This thought-provoking session explored the varied practices and perceptions surrounding note-taking in one-to-one learning development tutorials. The term 'case notes' was reconsidered, with participants agreeing that 'note-taking' more accurately reflects the pedagogical nature of the work, avoiding clinical connotations and inferences.

Discussion within the session highlighted the diversity of note-sharing practices across institutions. Whilst some practitioners routinely share notes with students, others restrict access or do not record notes at all. This prompted reflection on the potential benefits of making notes available to students, including enhanced reflection, goal reinforcement, and progress tracking. Time constraints emerged as a key factor influencing the depth and usefulness of notes, with longer tutorials allowing for more comprehensive documentation.

Participants reflected on the legal, ethical, and pedagogical justifications for recording and storing notes, emphasising the importance of transparency and student agency. At one university, a participant described how students receive written summaries of their tutorials, often co-created with tutors to reinforce understanding and promote independent learning. Although this practice has reduced overall tutorial capacity, its value is frequently affirmed in student feedback.

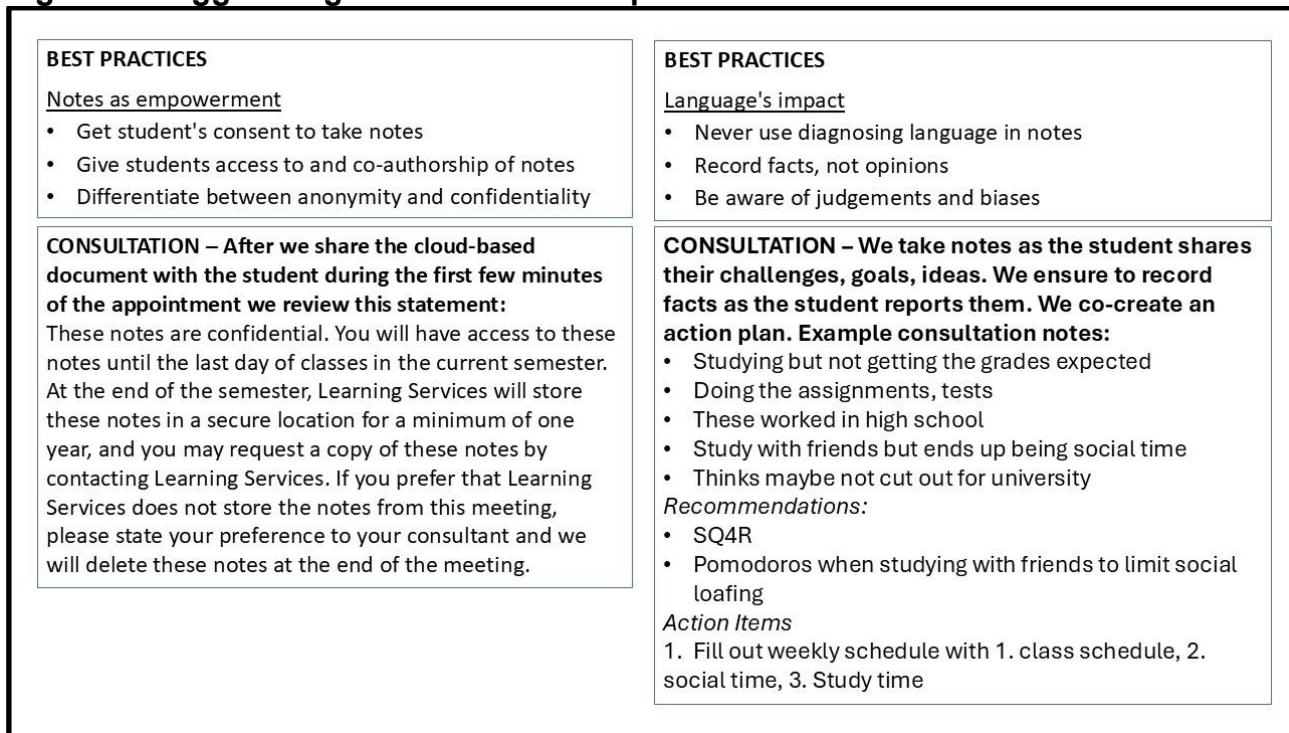
A further point of discussion was the importance of having a clear rationale for note-taking, grounded in legal, ethical, and pedagogical considerations. Participants agreed that while notes can be beneficial for some students, they are not universally necessary. Where

notes are taken and stored, transparency and student consent were identified as essential components of ethical practice.

Contributions from colleagues across the sector underscored the need for creative administrative systems that support learning development. Participants commented that the impact of administrative systems on workflows permeate a range of functional aspects of LD practice, and had been a point of operational importance raised in multiple sessions across the conference programme.

The presenters were praised for their energy and enthusiasm, and for facilitating a discussion on a core part of many colleagues’ roles that, whilst rooted in function, must have a considered purpose and basis.

**Figure 1. Suggested guidelines and best practice.**



**Next steps and additional questions**

The conversations in the groups were lively and generated a wealth of information. Some of the questions that would warrant future investigation are:

1. Is the act of taking notes during a meeting distracting or disengaging for the student and/or learning developer?

2. Is writing notes a good use of learning developer time? Is it their responsibility to take notes? Are the notes used constructively by the student?
3. In what specific ways can notes from one-to-one sessions further inclusivity and participation? How can these notes empower and motivate students in their learning journeys?
4. How does the learning developer taking the notes impact the development of independent learning?

Having concrete data to respond to these questions could help learning developers make decisions around their note-taking practices that ultimately benefit students.

### ***Authors' reflection***

We are grateful to those who attended an hour-long workshop on note-taking during tutorials, and to those who have provided their feedback here and in the document we co-created during the workshop.

During the workshop, participants were asked about their practices around recording, sharing, and storage of notes. They also had the opportunity to reflect more broadly and discuss their note-taking practices in light of the information shared during the workshop. It became clear during the workshop that the practices of taking notes varied widely from no notes taken or notes for personal use only, to fully co-created notes with detailed action plans. Some notes were being taken during appointments, while others were created post-appointment and sent as a summary to the student.

I came away from the workshop reflecting more deeply on the relationship between note-taking and student agency, particularly around modelling practices in a way that empowers students to eventually take ownership of those practices and strategies themselves, though not necessarily after one appointment.

One comment about publicising note-taking practice which I had not considered before was especially thought-provoking. It seems likely that if students knew they would leave an appointment with detailed notes including an action plan and tailored recommendations

(our current practice), they may be more inclined to attend – that their investment of time would leave them with something tangible.

Overall, we are grateful for the knowledge shared about note-taking practices internationally, and very pleased to learn that participants are considering their practices and thinking about them in terms of student agency and development. We hope to continue these discussions moving forward.

## ***Acknowledgements***

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