

**RICERCHE**

## **Tutorato universitario e importanza della formazione: una proposta dell'Università di Padova**

## **University tutoring and importance of training: a proposal from the University of Padua**

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### **ABSTRACT ITALIANO**

Il contributo esplora il tema della formazione dei tutor nell'istruzione superiore. La prima sezione discute il dibattito scientifico, presentando poi l'esperienza dell'Università di Padova rispetto alla formazione dei *peer tutor*. Vengono descritti, nello specifico, i dettagli di un nuovo modello formativo, proposto dal 2022/23.

In particolare, sono stati esplorati i bisogni e le percezioni dei tutor 2021/22 sul programma "tradizionale" (156 rispondenti), al fine di riprogettare consapevolmente l'offerta formativa. Nel 2022/23 (98 rispondenti) e nel 2023/24 (316 rispondenti) sono stati raccolti dati pre-post a seguito dell'implementazione di un nuovo modello formativo. Quest'ultimo ha migliorato significativamente le competenze e la preparazione dei tutor, e la soddisfazione è passata dal 54% all'83,2%.

Quanto proposto può rappresentare una buona pratica per la formazione dei tutor, mentre letteratura e ricerca costituiscono un punto di partenza per ampliare il dibattito sul tema.

### **ENGLISH ABSTRACT**

This paper explores tutor training in higher education. The first section reviews the scientific debate, then the University of Padua's experience with peer tutor training is discussed. A new training model, introduced in 2022/23, and the related questionnaire results are presented.

Specifically, the training needs and perceptions of 2021/22 tutors (156 respondents) about the previous "traditional" programme were explored to redesign the offer. In 2022/23 (98 respondents) and 2023/24 (316 respondents), outcomes and perceptions were collected using a pre-post questionnaire, following the implementation of a new training model: the revised training significantly improved tutors' skills and preparation. Satisfaction rose from 54% to 83.2%. What is proposed can serve as an example of desirable practice for tutor training in universities, whilst interpretation of the literature and the findings of research can serve as a starting point for wider debate on these issues.

### **Tutors in higher education: some insights from the literature**

Increasing attention has been paid to tutoring opportunities in the context of higher education, given their impact on the learning experience of students in multiple directions. It is widely recognised that tutoring has a positive influence on dynamics such as student retention, dropout rates, and the promotion of academic success. Through various actions of facilitation, mediation, supervision, inclusion and guidance, tutors can be seen as figures of reference for enrolled students, both in moments of transition and throughout the academic pathway, favouring the attainment of tutees' objectives and promoting personal, educational and professional growth (Guerra-Martín *et al.*, 2017; Magnoler & Pacquola, 2018; Formenti, 2018; Tapia *et al.*, 2019; Piazza & Rizzari, 2020).

Whilst there are common goals in tutoring - namely of supporting and empowering tutees and promoting their self-determination and autonomy (Guerra-Martín, 2014; Antonietti *et al.*, 2023) - opportunities for its application are uniquely characterised by the specificities, constraints and possibilities of the context (Formenti, 2018; Bonelli *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, each tutoring activity in higher education may set different figures.

Firstly, tutors might be university lecturers. The tutoring function they perform is different to their role when teaching. The “teacher” tutor is an experienced and competent person, possessing knowledge of the context and the skill to guide and accompany tutees along their path, according to the needs they express and the objectives of the tutoring activity (Gidman *et al.*, 2000; Parker, 2016; Loiodice & Dato, 2018).

The concepts involved are those of care, support and empowerment, often dependent on a model of individual contact with each tutee that is non-evaluative and personalised, different from the approach adopted in formal lessons (Earwaker, 1992).

Alternatively, there are tutors who play a “peer” role. Peer tutoring emphasises the equality of roles between tutor and tutee (e.g. in a student-student dynamic), indicating a relationship that transcends hierarchies or differences in “status”, and which can sometimes facilitate a more honest and spontaneous level of communication. In this type of relationship, peer tutors place their skills and experience at the disposal of tutees according to their needs and as appropriate for the aims of the tutoring provided (Bagnato, 2019; Wankiiri-Hale *et al.*, 2020; Arco-Tirado *et al.*, 2020; Cofer, 2020). As pointed out by Duran and Vidal (2004), there are different types of peer tutoring:

- *Cross-age tutoring*: students of different ages and from different courses, most common in the North American context. According to authors such as Lintorn (1973) and Lippitt (1976), students learn more when supported by students at least four years older than themselves. This categorisation is also supported by Finkelstein and Ducros (1989), who emphasise the importance of the tutor's expertise, but with a recognised attitudinal difference between the tutor and the tutee (Baudrit, 2000).
- *Same age tutoring*: students of the same age. Advantages offered by this type of tutoring are the situational and potentially socio-affective similarity of the students. Some authors (Ellis & Gauvin, 1992; Duran & Gauvin, 1993) point out that learning between students of the same age benefits from the greater possibility of social comparison.
- *True peers*: according to King, Staffieri and Adalgais (1998), learning should not be restricted to pairs consisting of “more experienced student and less experienced student”: help between peers ought to be spontaneous, hence unstructured.
- *Reciprocal peer tutoring (RPT)*: in Fantuzzo, King and Heller's studies (1992), pairs of similar age and ability alternate the roles of tutor and tutee. Many authors evaluate this type of peer support positively: Alison King and colleagues (1998) refer to it as mutual peer tutoring or transactive peer tutoring in their studies. Shanahan, Topping and Bamford (1994) also support this approach. Greenwood and colleagues (2001) refer to it as wide peer tutoring.

In addition to the categorisations described above, there could also be tutoring figures specifically recruited based on their skills and in line with the purposes of the service, even though they are neither lecturers nor students at the university. These are individuals specially selected, trained and included in the various tutoring projects or initiatives proposed by the institution (e.g. Degree Course Tutors, Internship Tutors, etc.), for instance, enhancing specific profiles or expertise (Formenti, 2018; Spadola *et al.* 2020; Da Re *et al.*, 2023).

### **The importance of tutor training in the context of higher education**

Regardless of the peculiarities that typify different tutoring services in universities, there is one element that should unite all the proposed strategies: the need for appropriate training for tutors (Barron & Foot, 1991; Roidi, 2015; Waltz, 2019, Grey & Osborne, 2020).

Increasing attention has been given to university tutoring, as summarised above, and a great deal of evidence is available worldwide regarding practices, experiences and methodologies. On the other hand, there is little documentation on training experiences dedicated to tutors, and it is rare to find reflections devoted specifically to “how tutors are trained”, although certain virtuous examples are not lacking (see Cabrera Cipirán, 2015; Arco-Tirado *et al.* 2020; Piazza & Rizzari 2020).

Together with selection, the training is a fundamental and indispensable requirement in rendering the tutoring approach effective. However, much reliance is placed on suitable selection processes to find the best candidates for this important role, it is impossible to assume that any given person selected will already be fully capable of mastering the methods, tools, purposes and processes involved in the tutoring activity (Bonelli *et al.*, 2022). The person performing the role of tutor must possess certain knowledge, skills and practical abilities, and must also display an attitude consistent with the tutoring approach (Silva Quiroz & Astudillo, 2013).

Regarding training, there is agreement in the literature that the complexity of the tutor's role calls for action in multiple directions. About the acquisition of knowledge, for example, there are various information — relating to the context and the type of activity envisaged — that the tutor must possess: what are the purposes of the service? To whom is it addressed? Who will I be dealing with in my tutoring activity? What is required of me? These and many other questions require clear answers before starting to work as a tutor. Tutors also must know and understand their role, and the nature and purpose of the service/activity in which they are involved. Moreover, tutors should be familiar with the institution's network of people and offices and informed as to the opportunities available for students. This will enable them to identify their own sphere of action more clearly and, at the same time, to suggest that the tutee explore other services. Finally, knowledge of the reference context is indispensable (Arco-Tirado *et al.*, 2020; Bonelli *et al.*, 2022).

Although important, possessing complete and correct information is not in itself sufficient to guarantee successful tutoring, which also requires both specific and cross-disciplinary skills. First and foremost, a tutor must have communication skills, which include active listening, empathy, the ability to process tutees' requests and to synthesise

and retrieve correct information from reliable sources. Skills such as critical thinking, motivational support skills and flexibility are required, likewise the ability to “navigate through uncertainty” and to react promptly and individually to different situations. Tutors must be able to maintain an open mind but also a professional focus, consistent with their role. More generally, tutors must know how to organise their work with precision, plan activities, manage possible problems and be able to make decisions, consulting with other colleagues in the network if necessary. Many tutoring situations also call for the ability to work in a team and manage interactions during teamwork, both between tutors and with tutees. Depending on the purpose of the service, guidance and re-orientation skills could also be advantageous (Gidman, 2001; Magnoler & Pacquola, 2018; Cofer, 2020).

Finally, the skills of tutors also include knowing how to perform their function by understanding their own role and the differences from that of other figures in the university network (Piazza & Rizzari, 2020; Da Re, 2024). While tutoring may seem similar to other roles, tutors have their own professional specificity. They are not mentors, friends or teachers, just as they are not counsellors, coaches or confidants (Bonelli & Bonin, 2025): knowing “who I am as a tutor” is essential to perform the role consistently and effectively, and to be certain of one's own identity in relation to other figures.

Based on this brief review, the tutor's role requires a complex set of knowledge, skills, awareness and attitudes. Some of these the person may already possess at the time of selection, but proper training is essential to consolidate the preparation and provide tutors with all the tools needed to perform their role effectively. With this in mind, training is proposed as a resource that will be not only informative, but also formative, pragmatic and applied to both theory and practice (Magnoler & Pacquola 2018; Da Re *et al.* 2023): an approach that aims to make the tutor an active participant in this process of developing individual skills and expertise (Antonietti *et al.*, 2023).

### Peer tutors of the University of Padua and training proposals

The University of Padua (UNIPD) has historically devoted particular attention and resources to tutoring (Da Re, 2024), and over time, developed a wide range of tutoring and peer tutoring initiatives. Each tutoring project or experience presents peculiar characteristics and can differ according to the recipients, the methods and the objectives (Da Re *et al.*, 2023).

Here we consider UNIPD projects involving peer tutors, who are university students enrolled typically in a master's degree or PhD programme who make their knowledge, skills and experience available in a university tutoring service by responding to a specific call for selection. According to the 2024-25 call, the University of Padua values several peer tutoring roles:

- *Information tutors*: these engage in activities aimed at assisting, guiding, informing and supporting students during their path, making them active participants in their own educational process;
- *Didactic tutors*: these organise support activities, generally to benefit groups of students, assisting them with their preparation for critical exams and/or workshops;

- *Inclusion tutors*: these work to ensure academic progress for students with disabilities or learning difficulties, providing support for class attendance and individual study and/or guaranteeing support during examinations;
- *Tutors for specific projects*: these are involved in specific projects, aimed mostly at improving the teaching-learning experience.

As concerning the importance of tutor training, in the light of the above discussion, the University of Padua offers all selected peer tutors initial general and interdisciplinary training, followed by more specific and in-depth training according to their area of expertise.

More specifically, from the academic year 2022-23, the peer tutor training programme has undergone an important transformation, evolving from a more general and informative approach adopted up until 2021-22, to a more targeted model that focuses on the training needs of the main tutor categories involved (Da Re *et al.*, 2023; Da Re, 2024).

The studies presented in the following sections were carried out within the framework of the Delegation for “Guidance, tutoring and placement” (Delegate: Prof. Andrea Gerosa; Advisor: Prof. Lorenza Da Re, academic years from 2021-22 to 2023-24). The research tools and processes were therefore developed in close connection with the university Governance, which approved the studies presented.

It should also be noted that all respondents gave their consent to participate in the surveys through an initial written consent item included in the online questionnaires. This item was preceded by a welcome message clearly outlining the research objectives and procedures. Only participants who explicitly consented to the study and the processing of data for research purposes – by checking the relevant box – were able to proceed with the questionnaire.

These principles were applied to all the studies discussed in this paper (see “Results” sections). No personal or sensitive data will be reported; the reflections presented are based exclusively on aggregated data.

### *Peer tutors of the University of Padua and training proposals*

Up to the academic year 2021-22, training for UNIPD peer tutors consisted mainly of two phases: (a) “general” training, an intensive and essentially informational course delivered over two days, addressed to all tutors, during which topics of “transversal” utility (i.e. not differentiated by type of tutor) were covered, concerning the figure of the tutor in general and elements of practical and administrative advice; (b) “specific” training, managed by the “Referente” (area contact person, usually a professor), with methods and content customised according to the needs of the particular service, which aimed to provide targeted knowledge and skills. In reality, this specific training phase did not necessarily follow a universal or “centralised” model: it could be managed by each Referente according to individual preference (Da Re *et al.*, 2023).

However, it was becoming clear that this training model needed to be renewed, especially the general training, which was of a purely informative nature. Accordingly, a pedagogical training team was tasked to initiate, develop and supervise a process of research and pedagogical innovation applied to tutor training (1).



Specifically, at the end of the 2021-2022 academic year (May 2022), a survey was carried out to explore the training experience of peer tutors who had attended a broadly informative “transversal” training course at the beginning of the year. The intention was to canvass their opinions and their perceptions as to how effective the training received had been, prior to redesigning the training activities for the following year, drawing as far as possible on their actual experiences and their suggestions (Bonelli *et al.*, 2022). The questionnaire was developed *ad hoc* to address the specific needs of the study, while drawing on the scientific literature on tutoring discussed in the opening sections (see par. 1 and 2). The tool consisted mainly of closed-ended questions, except for a few optional open-ended items aimed at exploring issues not covered in the previous questions.

As for the analytical approach, quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistical techniques, including the calculation of frequencies and percentages, as well as mean or median values for scale measures. Qualitative responses from open-ended items were examined through content analysis, assigning *post hoc* categories to synthesise the core themes emerging from each answer. All analyses were performed with the aid of Microsoft Excel. 179 tutors responded, of whom 156 had participated in general training. The survey provided data, useful for analytical purposes, (a) on the tutors' training needs, (b) on aspects that were not sufficiently explored during the general training, and (c) on the degree of satisfaction with the training received. Some of the quantitative results are detailed below (please refer to Bonelli, Bonin & Da Re, 2022 for the full results):

(a) On the subject of training needs, tutors identified the themes, topics and competences that should be addressed, in their opinion, by a training programme dedicated to the university's peer tutors, to ensure adequate preparation before starting. This question therefore referred not to the course they had attended, but to an “ideal” training course, and was essential to understand the training needs of those about to take on the role of peer tutor. 113 tutors out of 179 answered a check list (closed-ended questions, with the possibility of indicating more than one option), to emphasise the importance of receiving training on “what is the tutor's responsibility and what is the responsibility of other University offices and services”; 104 considered training on “the tutor's role and the tutoring attitude” to be important, and 96 registered interest in the topic concerning “the specific characteristics of the student's course or area of work”. All of these aspects suggest a very strong need for understanding of one's own role and context.

(b) On the other hand, as regards the aspects that were not sufficiently developed in the actual training received (156 tutors responding), again by way of a check list, tutors reported shortcomings on issues such as “specific characteristics of the area where one works” (indicated by 53 tutors out of 156), “how to communicate and speak in public” (N=51) and “what is the responsibility of the tutor and what is that of other services” (N=50). It will be seen that certain of the aspects reported as not sufficiently developed during the training received are also among those reported as being the most important needs (point a).

(c) With regard to overall satisfaction, in 2021-22 only 54% of the tutor respondents (85 out of 156) gave an assessment of 7 out of 10 or higher, all others indicating 6 or less.

Almost half of the respondents therefore considered the training they received to have been barely sufficient, or in reality insufficient, for the purpose of performing their tutoring role to the best of their ability.

Notwithstanding the conciseness of the data collected, the findings reveal a training experience which, while useful, needed new life and pedagogical restructuring. Starting from this study, therefore, a new training model for UNIPD peer tutors was designed.

### *Results. Designing a new training model: tutor training in AY 2022-23*

The examination of tutors' needs presented in the previous paragraph led to a redesign of training activities, suggesting how they could be made more useful and effective for peer tutors. In particular, having studied the reactions and expectations of those who perform the role in question, it became possible to base the redesign not only on theoretical assumptions, but also on the actual experience of UNIPD tutors.

The new 2022-23 training model represents a significant departure from former practice, both in terms of content and methodological approaches, and with regard to the length of the course and the extent of what is proposed. In particular, a formative and active approach was chosen, operating in multiple directions (Bonelli *et al.*, 2022; Da Re *et al.*, 2023; Da Re, 2024):

- (1) content was added or modified to give space to the topics deemed most important by the tutors themselves, based on the results of the study presented in the previous section;
- (2) the general training given to all peer tutors took on workshop characteristics, focusing on the soft skills considered indispensable for tutoring (public speaking, effective communication, teamwork, conflict management);
- (3) customised pathways (specific training) were increased on the basis of the different types of tutoring figures, albeit recommending certain common pathways, rather than leaving this part entirely up to the Referente for each area, as was previously the case;
- (4) a greater focus was placed on the development of soft skills useful for the work of tutoring, with the guaranteed inclusion of dynamic training meetings, conducted in medium-sized groups by expert supervisors.

This resulted in a training course of at least 18 hours (in some cases even longer), structured as follows:

- a) Initial information day (6 hours): introductory session involving all peer tutors, at which the training course, the main governance figures, certain university services and key administrative practices were presented. During the day, there were discussions on the figure of the tutor, peer education and peer tutoring, and in particular on the importance of communication and educational relations;
- b) General training (6 hours): divided into heterogeneous groups according to their area of expertise, participants addressed topics that were transversally germane to the role of tutor, covering communication, public speaking, group management and conflict resolution;
- c) Specific training: tutors of each type attended sessions of duration ranging from 6 to 10 hours, dedicated to the skills required for their particular role. In addition, tutors with

coordination functions attended an additional session of 4 hours, focusing on leadership, team management and delegation skills;

d) Pathway for international and coordinating tutors (12 hours): a specific programme was developed for a number of international tutors who had not attended the general training.

In addition to these “core” initiatives, directed at all tutors (or to specific subgroups according to the type of service), the Referente for each area or project then organised coordination meetings and further specific training sessions, according to the needs and timing of individual services and activities, as in the past.

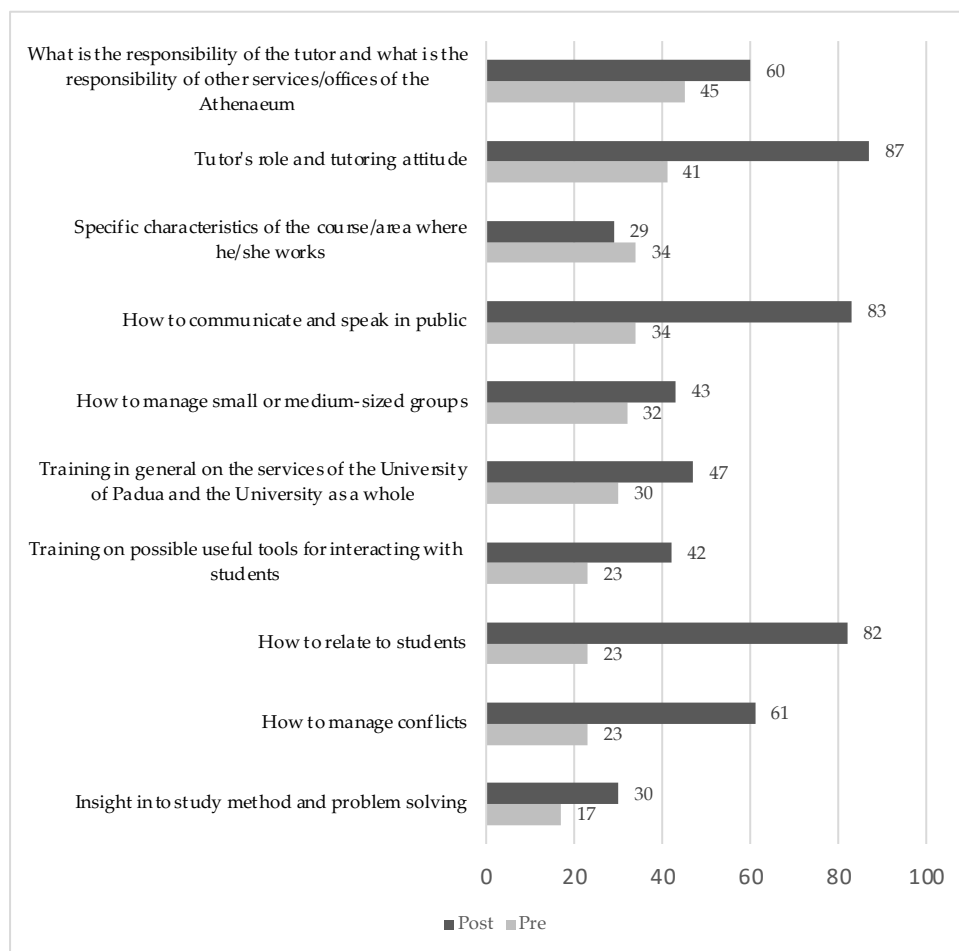
The new 2022-23 training model also envisaged various assessment tools, useful for monitoring participation, surveying the progress of activities and assessing the outcome of the new training practices, with continual review and improvement in view.

In particular, pre and post online questionnaires were submitted to all participating tutors, at the beginning (September 2022) and at the end (November-December 2022) of the course, to collect initial expectations and solicit final impressions of the training received. The questionnaires were specifically developed for this study, based on the research literature and the tutoring framework discussed in the theoretical sections of this paper.

A total of 328 respondents took the “pre” survey (response rate 67% out of 486 invited), while 177 respondents took the “post” survey (32% out of 555). A unique code allowed the identification of 98 tutors who responded to both questionnaires, and reference will be made to this group in the results below (for more details: Da Re, 2024). With respect to data analysis, quantitative items were examined using descriptive statistics, primarily reporting absolute and percentage frequencies, as well as means for scale-based scores. Responses to open-ended questions were analysed through qualitative content analysis, with ex post labels developed to capture the main meaning units of each response. All analyses were conducted using the Excel software. A selection of the quantitative results will be presented here.

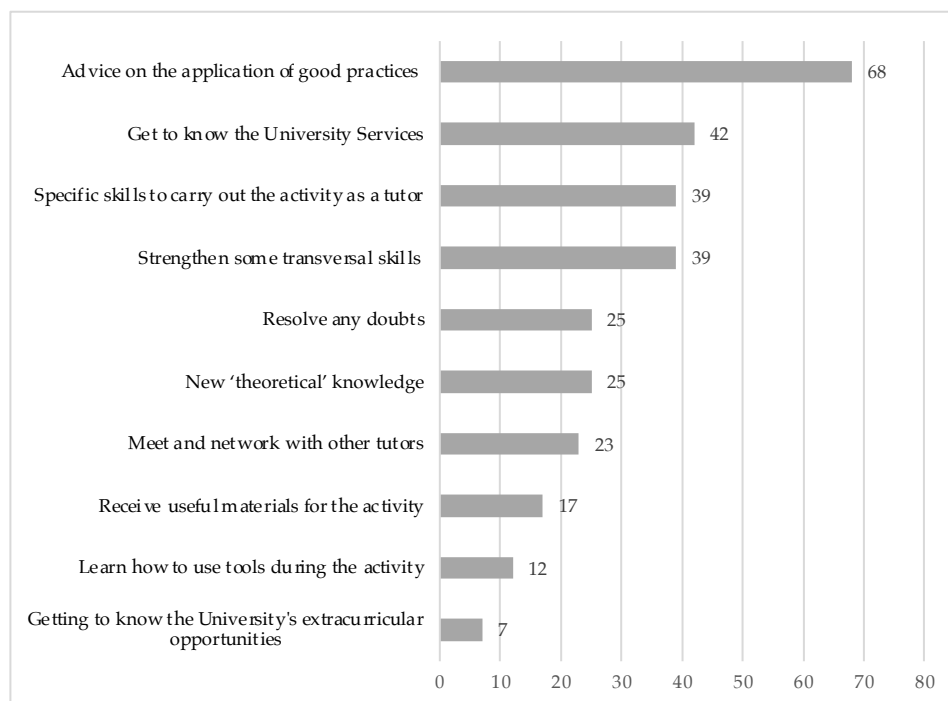
Regarding the comparison between “ideal” training needs (pre) and the compliance of the new training with these needs (post), a check list question was included in both instances, with the same answer options: in the pre questionnaire, tutors were asked to indicate their training needs, i.e. the topics they considered “ideally” important to address through training; in the post questionnaire, tutors were asked to identify the needs that were actually dealt with exhaustively in the training course. The activities proposed appear to have broadly addressed all the topics considered important, as shown in Fig. 1. The only aspect on which a few tutors (29 out of 98) expressed dissatisfaction concerns the “specific characteristics of the course/area where the tutor works”; this however can be reconciled with what was intended, since the topic in question was the responsibility of the Referente, and therefore dealt with in greater depth later on.





**FIG. 1: TRAINING NEEDS (PRE) AND ADEQUACY OF TRAINING RECEIVED (POST). ABSOLUTE NUMBER, TOTAL N=98**

On the other hand, with regard to what was actually achieved thanks to the training received (post), as specified in Fig. 2, many tutors indicate that they obtained advice on the application of good practices (68 out of 98), improved certain transversal skills (N=39), and gained a better knowledge of the university's services (N=42). Among the aspects listed as main achievements, one of the least reported is knowledge of the university's extracurricular opportunities (only 7 out of 98).



**FIG. 2: HIGHER ACHIEVEMENTS DUE TO TRAINING RECEIVED (POST). ABSOLUTE NUMBER, N=98**

On the question of overall satisfaction, it should be pointed out that the tutors of the 2022-23 academic year were not familiar with the previous training model, which means that their assessment of the course they attended was made without drawing “comparisons”. For the record however, compared to participants in the previous edition, there was a rise from 54% of evaluations indicating 7 out of 10 or higher in 2021-22, to 79% in 2022-23, which confirms a high level of satisfaction with what was experienced.

More specifically, the positive aspects reported in connection with the 2022-23 training indicate gratification at what was on offer, especially the opportunity for involvement in tackling the educational challenges encountered and for developing various skills, useful both in one's own role and across other disciplines.

The 2022-23 course certainly represented a big change from what had gone before: it had many positive impacts on the training of tutors, and on the development of their knowledge and skills. However, there was room for improvement, in terms not only of the content – some items more effective than others – but also the timing and duration of the training. Tutor training is a necessity, but an excessively long course runs the risk of being at odds with organisational needs and time constraints, or too dispersive (Belzer, 2006). Accordingly, the experience and research for the year 2022-23 afforded the platform for an appropriate redesign of training for the following year.

#### *Results. Training 2023-24: improvements and new approaches*

The pedagogical coordination team made certain improvements to tutor training for AY 2023-2024, building on the results of the previous year (Da Re *et al.*, 2023; Da Re, 2024).

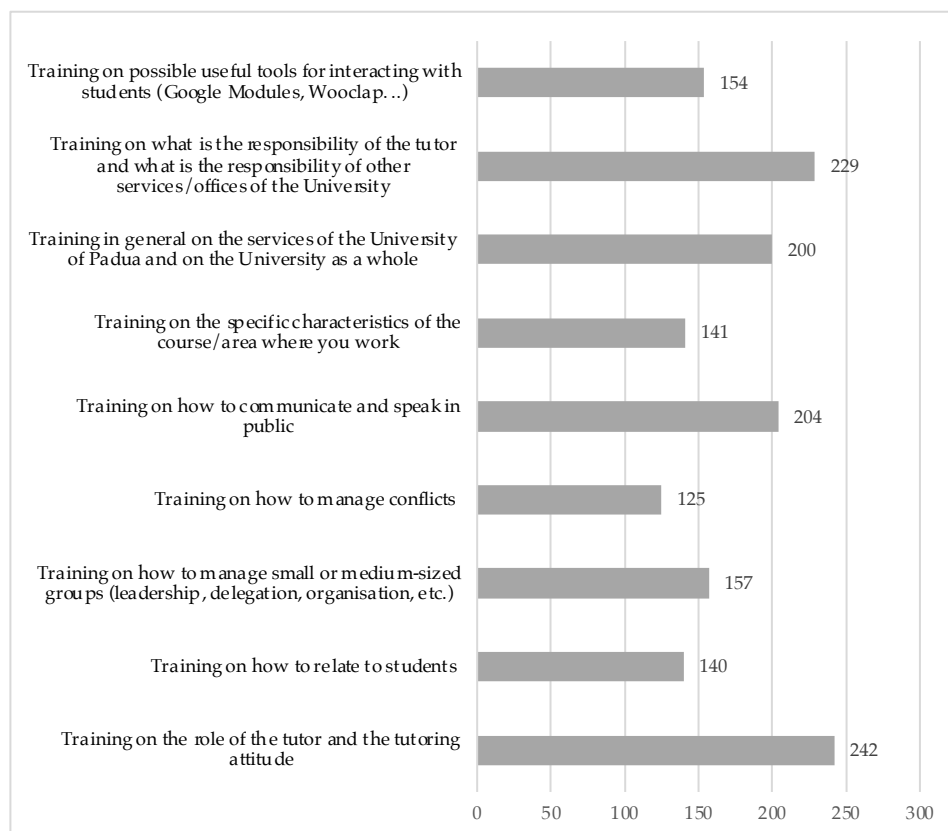
Changes include:

- (1) reduction of the mandatory initial presentation from 6 to 4 hours;
- (2) reduction of general training from 6 to 4 hours, focusing on relational aspects and effective communication (compulsory attendance);
- (3) enhancement of specific training by type of tutoring, with greater focus on the various tutoring activities. Optional attendance, but possibly using open badge recognition;
- (4) in general, expansion of practical activities and adoption of an increasingly interactive approach during meetings.

With regard to specific training (point 3 above), digital certificates were created for information and teaching tutors, with the support of a pedagogical team that defined the required competences (2). The issuing of an open badge was conditional on participation in at least 10 hours of training and completion of a pre-post questionnaire. In January 2024, 93 open badges were issued: 41 for information tutors and 52 for teaching tutors (Da Re, 2024).

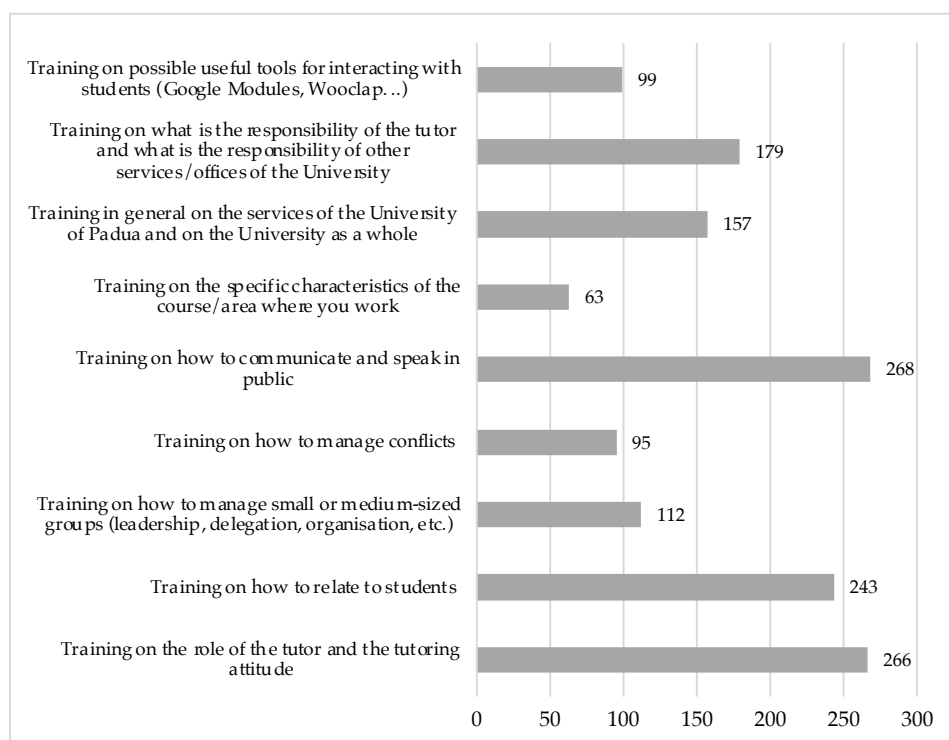
The pre-post assessment tools were also reintroduced in A.Y. 2023-24 (same structure and analytical methodology as the tools used during the previous year – see par. 3.2), at the beginning and at the end of the training course. These instruments were useful for gauging the initial expectations of the tutors and their ultimate impressions.

In the “pre” questionnaire, before the start of the course, training needs were identified (question: “Please indicate, among those listed below, the topics on which you feel you need to be trained in order to best carry out your work as a Tutor”). Of the 394 respondents to the pre-survey (September 2023), 242 tutors consider training on the tutor's role and tutoring attitude to be necessary, 229 indicate what is the tutor's responsibility and what is the responsibility of other university offices, and 204 want to learn more about how to communicate and speak in public (full details in Fig. 3).



**FIG. 3: TRAINING NEEDS BEFORE STARTING TRAINING (PRE QUESTIONNAIRE), EDITION 2023-24. ABSOLUTE NUMBER, N= 394**

Of the 316 tutors responding to the post questionnaire (November-December 2023), on the effectiveness of the training (Fig. 4), 266 tutors out of 316 report having received adequate training with regard to the tutor's role and tutoring attitude, 268 regarding how to speak and communicate in public and 179 on what is the responsibility of the tutor and what is the responsibility of other University services. Again, the highest achievements are also consistent with the main training needs. On the other hand, the aspect on which relatively few tutors feel they have been adequately trained is "Training on the specific characteristics of the course/area", but, as already specified, this reflects the structure of the training, given that the topic would be managed in due course by the Referente.



**FIG 4: MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS THROUGH TRAINING (POST QUESTIONNAIRE), EDITION 2023-24. ABSOLUTE NUMBER, N= 316**

Finally, 83.2% of the 316 respondents to the post survey were satisfied with the training they received, giving the course a score of 7 or higher. Significantly, this result is higher than both the 2022-23 evaluation (79% satisfaction) and the 2021-22 evaluation (54% satisfaction), which predates the process of renewal. Thus, a trend of continuous evolution and improvement can be observed in the overall satisfaction of participating tutors.

### Discussion and future prospects

The literature review and the research presented highlight the importance of university tutor training as an indispensable element of effective tutoring. An accurate training model ensures that tutors acquire the knowledge, competences, information and skills, both general and specific, necessary to understand and act out their role effectively within the context of higher education, whereas the absence of such training will in turn exclude the benefits of all the various reflective and professional tools that enable tutors to master the requisite techniques and fulfil their function in line with the designated service and its objectives. Indeed, it is not possible to “improvise” as a tutor, and the professionalisation of such a figure becomes even more important if, as argued above, tutoring can have an impact on fundamental issues such as student retention, academic success, dropout rates, and the pursuit of personal, educational and professional ambitions by recipients of the service (Guerra-Martín *et al.*, 2017).

The evidence presented in this paper regarding training needs and the effectiveness of training, which relates to peer tutors at the University of Padua, confirms what has



already been made clear in the literature, namely that training plays a central role in the work of tutors. In effect, training requirements branch out in various directions, a factor which – in the words of the tutors themselves – reflects the importance of learning more about the role of tutors, the characteristics of the context in which they operate, and how to strengthen the skills that are specifically of use in tutoring activities.

Moreover, following the redesign of the training developed at the University of Padua, the results of subsequent surveys show increased levels of preparation and satisfaction among tutors since the training was remodelled, becoming less informative, longer-lasting, more active and centred on the real needs of UNIPD peer tutors. The findings of this paper can provide a basis for the continual improvement of tutor training, aimed at achieving greater consistency with the needs of the actual tutors and creating a more effective resource for the preparation of these important figures.

In addition to documenting the practices and outcomes of the proposed training regime for peer tutors at our university, the content of this paper can also be useful for the purposes of comparison and of debate regarding other national and international tutoring situations. Whilst certain of the elements described herein are customised according to the needs of the specific context, the general approach – comprising certain more transversal and other more specific topics, treated both informatively and formatively – can also be readapted to other areas or services, thereby guaranteeing adequate preparation for tutors.

To summarise, ensuring a continuous alignment between the training needs of peer tutors and the actual training offer is crucial both theoretically and practically. Interventions that are decontextualized or overly generic risk being ineffective and fail to address the specific competencies required in this complex role. Our findings reaffirm the importance of recognizing and enhancing the value of peer tutor training, acknowledging that tutoring is a demanding role that requires structured support. While the results are context-specific to the University of Padova and are not intended for strict generalization, the insights gained are likely relevant to similar university settings. Several cross-cutting principles, highlighted both in our study and in the literature, can be applied broadly: e.g. the necessity of providing targeted training support, the importance of combining informational and formative approaches, and the need to explicitly address critical reflections on the tutor's role and their fundamental mission. These principles emphasize that effective peer tutoring depends not only on knowledge transfer but also on thoughtful, context-aware preparation and ongoing support.

### Authors' notes

Content attribution. Whilst the paper is authored jointly, Lorenza Da Re can be credited individually with par. #2, 3.2, 3.3. and Roberta Bonelli with #1, 3.1. Par. "4. Discussion and future prospects" is elaborated jointly.

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## Notes

(1) Scientific contact person for the training of University of Padua tutors for the academic years 2022-23 and 2023-24: Professor Lorenza Da Re. The Unipd tutor training design and assessment team is composed, in addition to Lorenza Da Re (coord.), of Roberta Bonelli, Angelica Bonin, Vanessa Mirandola and Elena Bullado.

(2) Open Badge development coordinated by Professor Lorenza Da Re and developed together with Roberta Bonelli, Angelica Bonin, Elena Bullado and Vanessa Mirandola.

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